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# MERELY MARY ANN

A Comedy in Four Acts

Adapted by ISRAEL ZANGWILL

From his story of the same name



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# MERELY MARY ANN

Comedy in Four Acts

ADAPTED BY

ISRAEL ZANGWILL

FROM HIS STORY OF THE SAME NAME  
GIVING FOR THE FIRST TIME HIS LATER VERSION OF ACT IV

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Act IV was rewritten by Israel Zangwill in 1921. This later version, which the author considered distinctly better than the original form, is now published for the first time.

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## MERELY MARY ANN

Produced on September 8, 1904, at the Duke of York's Theatre, London,  
with the following cast of characters :—

### MEN.

LANCELOT (a Composer) . . . . .	<i>Mr. Henry Ainley.</i>
PETER (in Business) . . . . .	<i>Mr. Gerald du Maurier.</i>
HERR BRAHMSON (a Music Publisher) . . . . .	<i>Mr. Charles Cartwright.</i>
REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (a Country Vicar) . . . . .	<i>Mr. George Raiemond.</i>
O'GORMAN (a Journalist) . . . . .	<i>Mr. Hubert Willis.</i>
JIM BLAYDES (a Medical Student) . . . . .	<i>Mr. Herbert Mansfield.</i>
LORD VALENTINE (of the Automobile Club)	<i>Mr. Cranley Douglas.</i>

### WOMEN.

MRS. LEADBATTER (a Lodging-house Keeper) . . . . .	<i>Miss Ada Dwyer.</i>
ROSIE (her daughter) . . . . .	<i>Miss Mabel Garden.</i>
THE SISTERS TRIPPET (KITTY AND POLLY, Music Hall Dancers) . . . . .	<i>Miss Paula von Arold.</i>
LADY CHELMER (a Poor Peeress) . . . . .	<i>Miss Maud Wynter.</i>
CAROLINE, COUNTESS OF FOXWELL (her friend) . . . . .	<i>Miss Susie Vaughan.</i>
THE HON. MRS. FITZGEORGE (in Society) . . . . .	<i>Miss Geraldine Oliffe.</i>
LADY GLYNN (of the Smart Set) . . . . .	<i>Miss Rosa Leo.</i>
LADY GLADYS VALENTINE (the Countess's daughter) . . . . .	<i>Mrs. Sam Sothern.</i>
ROWENA FITZGEORGE (Mrs. Fitzgeorge's daughter) . . . . .	<i>Miss Cartwright.</i>
MARY ANN (merely) . . . . .	<i>Miss Hylda Franklin.</i>
	<i>Miss Eleanor Robson.</i>

### CREATURES.

DICK (a Canary) . . . . .	<i>Dick.</i>
HOWARD (a Butler) . . . . .	<i>Mr. Howard Templeton.</i>

**ACT I**

Hall of Mrs. Leadbatter's Lodging house in South London.

**ACT II**

Lancelot's Bed-Sitting Room.

**ACT III**

The Same.

**ACT IV**

A Garden Room in the grounds of Mead Manor.

A month between Act I and II. A week between Act II and III.  
Six years between Act III and IV.

—从

THERE YOU ARE, POLLY! IS THAT YOUR NAME?

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## MERELY MARY ANN

### ACT I

*The SCENE represents the hall of MRS. LEADBATTER'S lodgings. The hall door is R., with letter box and door mat. There is also a window in this wall. There are two hall chairs, one up stage R. and another down stage R., a hat rack and umbrella stand—these two latter furnished with sundry coats and hats of all colours, sticks and umbrellas of all shapes. On the hall table stand five bedroom candlesticks with matches, three little heaps of letters, postcards and newspapers, and a large clothes brush. Gaudy oleographs on passage wall. The dining-room door is R.C. Carpeted stairs lead to LANCELOT'S door, L., with a little landing, both visible ere the stairs turn. Before these stairs goes the passage leading past the hall bench to the kitchen and parlour doors L. The gas is burning in the hall lamp, but rather dimly, with suggestion of lateness and economy. The stage is empty. The wind and rain are heard swishing outside. After a while a latchkey is heard to adjust itself in the lock, the door opens and O'GORMAN, a pock-marked, good-humoured, rather seedy journalist, stands half in and half out, his head turning towards an unseen driver, his lowered umbrella dripping.*

O'GORMAN (*to unseen CABMAN, who is heard growling and grumbling hoarsely in reply throughout this speech*). What do I call that ? I call it quite enough for three-quarters of a mile. Eh ? It's a wet night. Pwhat else would I be taking a cab for, begorra ? Pwhat's that ? I must give you sixpence more ? Needs must when the devil drives, eh ? Is that it ? No, devil take me, don't you try swearing at me, because I'm a journalist and can bate you at it. Sacré-bleu, Donner-Blitzen, Amsterdam, Rotterdam and the Hellespont ! (*Enters and bangs door.*) Mother in heaven ! Pwhat a blessing to get the paper to bed ! (*Yawns, puts wet umbrella in stand, sings.*)

"Kiss me good-night, dear love,  
Drame of the old delight,  
My spirit is summoned—"

Bad luck to it ! Shall I never get the tune out of my head ? It's as catching as 'flu, and I've got it bad. Devil take Keeley Lesterre

and his "Good-night and Good-bye." Any letters? (*Takes his pile.*) Ah, from Nancy, the darlint.

"Drame of the old delight!"

There I go again! I'm as bad as a barrel organ. (*Strikes match, lights his candle, and begins to walk upstairs.*)

(*Mrs. LEADBATTER's voice, coming from kitchen, singing softly in outrageous Cockney accent.*)

"Dream of the old delight,  
My spirit is summoned above."

(*Enter Mrs. LEADBATTER L. She is stout, slipshod and frowsy, and carries a candlestick.*)

O'GORMAN (*in unconscious duet with Mrs. LEADBATTER*).

"Kiss me, dear love, good-night."

(*Turns.*) Eh?

(*Embarrassed pause; both holding candlesticks high to see each other, he half-way upstairs, she at bottom.*)

Ah, a nasty night, Mrs. Leadbatter.

MRS. LEADBATTER (*at L.C.*). Yes, Mr. O'Gorman, I do 'ope all the gents 'ave shut their windows. If I shut them, they say there's not henough hair, and if I leaves them open they say there's too much water.

O'GORMAN. I dare say we lead you the devil of a life between us all. You must feel as if you had seven husbands to mother, each more unreasonable than the other six.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Oh, no, no. (*Shaking head.*) Seven lodgers is child's play to one 'usband. And I've buried two.

O'GORMAN. The devil admire you! (*Mounting further.*) Pleasant drames!

MRS. LEADBATTER. Same to you, Mr. O'Gorman. (*Crosses towards table up R.*)

O'GORMAN (*hums*).

"Drame of the old delight."

(*Turns.*) Och, by the way, Mrs. Leadbatter, don't forget to take in my paper for me in the morning—the *Sunday Sledgehammer*, you know.

MRS. LEADBATTER (*back again a little*). Yes, sir, though I can't stomach newspapers coming out on Sunday. I may be a hignorant person who can't read them, but I do know Sunday is for rest.

O'GORMAN. Sure, it's right you are, and I shan't get up till Monday afternoon.

(*Both laugh.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Well, sir, I 'opes it will be forgiven me on 'igh.

O'GORMAN. Don't worry about getting into Heaven. I'll give ye a press ticket. Good night. (*Disappears—heard singing*)

"Kiss me good-night, dear love."

MRS. LEADBATTER (*sings*).

"Dream of the old delight,  
My spirit is summoned above—"

Goodness me, these wet humbrellas will be the ruin of my humbrella stand—' (*Puts candle on hall table, and takes O'GORMAN's umbrella towards the kitchen. A double rat-tat at the street door.*) What can that be at this hour? (*Calls down to kitchen.*) Mary Ann! Mary Ann! Don't you hear a knock? Drat that girl. When she's wanted in the kitchen she's in the hattic, and when the droring-room bell rings, she's in the coal 'ole. (*Rat-tat.*) All right, all right, don't be so himpatient! You ain't one of my 'usbands come back. (*Shuffles to door and half opens it.*)

A MESSENGER BOY'S voice. Mr. Lancelot!

MRS. LEADBATTER. He's hout, and 'igh time 'e was hin. (*Looking at coats on hall rack.*)

A MESSENGER BOY'S voice. Sign, please.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Bother Mr. Lancelot. Folks ought not to be worried at such hours. Past eleven, and my 'and's gone to sleep. (*Calls towards lower regions.*) Rosie!

ROSIE (*from parlour*). Yes, Ma—I'm busy.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Oh, you're always such a busy bee. Come 'ere and sign. (*Moves over a little R.*)

ROSIE. Oh, bother!

(MESSENGER BOY heard whistling, "Kiss me good-night, dear love," etc.)

(ROSIE enters from parlour door, holding pen and papers. ROSIE is of the barmaid type; coarse beauty, over-dressed, over-good-looking, flaxen-haired. She speaks in a pretentiously genteel manner.)

MRS. LEADBATTER. It's for that Mr. Lancelot.

ROSIE. Oh! (*Quickens her pace, signs, receives letter and places it on hall table.*)

(MRS. LEADBATTER closes the door and drops into a hall chair, down R. The whistling ceases.)

MRS. LEADBATTER. You oughtn't to stay hup so late a-readin' them love-tales.

ROSIE (*coming down R.C.*). Oh, Ma! Why, I was doing the bills for the week, before going to uncle's.

MRS. LEADBATTER. But the week hain't finished. There might be more breakages—if we've a bit of luck. I 'ope you've charged the third floor front with the jug 'e cracked.

*Rosie (examining the bill with a guilty air). Is—is it cracked ?*

*Mrs. LEADBATTER (springs up). Yes, and you as well—you'll be telling me next you 'aven't put heighteenpence hextra for the 'ot supper of the second floor back.*

*Rosie (consulting bill). Did he have it hot ?*

*Mrs. LEADBATTER. Yes, and you'll 'ave it 'ot. (Advances threateningly. Rosie backs away from her.) Where's the use of your grand heddication ? Hall you do is to sprawl on sofas and snivel over story books. There's no henergy about the gals nowadays. Why, when I was your hage I was a widow. You 'aven't forgotten to charge Mr. Lancelot for keeping the gas burning all Thursday night, now 'ave you ?*

*Rosie (L.C.). Oh, Mr. Lancelot wouldn't like that—his gas is inclusive.*

*Mrs. LEADBATTER (R.C.). Hinclusive ? Yes, all day, not all night. It's henough we throw in London fogs—that's hinclusive henough. Besides, Mr. Lancelot howes me so much already 'e won't mind howing me another shilling. He's more worrit than hall the lodgers put together, what with his pianner busting out any moment like a barrel-organ.*

*Rosie. Oh, Ma ! Mr. Lancelot plays like an angel.*

*Mrs. LEADBATTER. I never 'eard as hangels could play the pianner. 'Arps is their hinstrument. But you're hall the same, you gals. Crazy over a good-looking young man. Wait till you're a widow—you'll know better. Has for Mary Ann, she broke the blue gravy dish through 'urrying to answer 'is bell.*

*Rosie (tossing her head—moving down L.). I don't think you ought to class me with *Mary Ann* !*

*Mrs. LEADBATTER (R.C.). 'Eaven forbid. Hall I say is you're hall alike. Ah, there she is at last.*

*(Mary Ann in a patched print dress and a dirty apron has appeared on the landing at head of stairs, carrying in her apron a motley pile of men's dirty boots of every shape and size. She is a slim, pretty, almost poetic figure, despite the smut or two on her face, and her wan, under-fed look. During the following scene, until she speaks, Rosie busies herself with making out bills, using the left wall as a backing.)*

*Mrs. LEADBATTER. Mary Ann !*

*MARY ANN. Yes'm. (Descending.)*

*Mrs. LEADBATTER (R.C.). Have all them boots gone to bed ?*

*MARY ANN. Yes'm. (Descending.)*

*Mrs. LEADBATTER (turns to hall table.) Ah, yes—only five candlesticks. No ladies' shoes ?*

*MARY ANN. No, mum—the Sisters Trippet ain't home from the theatre.*

*Mrs. LEADBATTER. The theayter. Ain't I told you often enough ?*

MARY ANN (C.). The theayter.

MRS. LEADBATTER. And who else is hout besides Mr. Lancelot ?

MARY ANN. The young man from the hospital.

MRS. LEADBATTER. The 'Orspital ! You country booby !

MARY ANN. The 'Orspital.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Well, you can wait to turn out the gas and lock up. Rosie and me is going to bed. (*Takes candle from table.*)

MARY ANN (C.). Yes'm. (*Gapes.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Don't stand opening your mouth like a pillar box.

(MARY ANN closes her mouth hastily.)

(*Moving down R.C., with a touch of kindness.*) You needn't do the boots to-night.

MARY ANN. Please, mum, I don't mind, if I might do them upstairs in my bedroom.

MRS. LEADBATTER. What ! Are you afraid of the black-beetles ?

MARY ANN. No, mum, but I can see the moon.

MRS. LEADBATTER (R.C.). The moon ! So that's what you've been hup to hall this while—mooning the precious hours away.

MARY ANN. No, mum, the rain did hide the moon, but it's giving over now, and the stars are coming out.

MRS. LEADBATTER. The stars ! What next ? Well, I never.

ROSIE (L.). It's all moonshine, Ma, she just wants to get with her canary.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Yes, that reminds me. I do 'ope, Mary Ann, you'll keep that 'orrid bird of yours quiet ; it quite broke up my rest last night.

MARY ANN. I'm so sorry, mum. I can't make out why he did sing—all in the dark and cold. I'll talk to he.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Not to 'ee, silly. To hit.

MARY ANN. To hit.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Come along, Rosie.

(ROSIE crosses up to table, and looks over letters, holding them up to light.)

What a worrit to heddicate you. I'll never take a country gal again. Well, go and talk to your blessed bird. (*Going to stairs.*)

MARY ANN. Oh, thank you, mum. I'll get the blacking brushes. (*Pours out boots in passage and hastens towards kitchen.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. And, Mary Ann !

MARY ANN. Yes'm.

MRS. LEADBATTER. You won't gawk at your moon and forget my gas. (*Going upstairs.*)

MARY ANN. No, mum.

MRS. LEADBATTER (*goes one step higher.*) And see that the wet umbrellas don't spile me umbrella stand.

MARY ANN. Yes'm.

MRS. LEADBATTER (*some stairs higher*). And be hup sharp to take in the milk can—these herea thieves is gettin' bold as brass.

MARY ANN. Yes'm.

(*Rosie ascends stairs.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*on landing*). And don't forget to-morrow's the Lord's day, and the third floor back must be waked for heary church.

MARY ANN. Yes'm.

ROSIE (*on the landing*). And, Mary Ann ! I shan't be here to-morrow, so you'll wait on the Sisters Trippet.

MARY ANN. Yes'm.

MRS. LEADBATTER (*invisible*). Oh, and get the *Sunday Sledge-ammer* when you 'ear the newsboy.

MARY ANN. Yes'm.

(*A pause. Silence. The wind heard again, but not the rain. Then the noise of Jim Blaydes fumbling outside the hall door.*)

JIM (*invisible, from outside*). Dash that keyhole ! Where has it—hic !—got to ?

(*Yawning—long fumbling ; impatient shaking ; at last a timid knock. Mary Ann runs up gaping, with the blacking brushes in her hand, and opens the door. Jim Blaydes enters, a little but not too much the worse for liquor, in a mackintosh, a gaudy tie, and a medical student air.*)

Sorry to trouble you—been cutting up corpses in the hospital.  
(*Crosses up to table.*)

MARY ANN (*to herself*). Oh dear ! he can't say 'orspital. (*Kindly.*) I'm going up, sir, you can lean on me.

JIM. Thank you—not without my letters. (*Staggers slightly.*) Makes nerves unsteady—cutting up corpses—real live corpses. (*Takes his two letters.*) That is two letters, isn't it, Mary Ann ? (*With morbid nervous jocularity.*) One, two, eh ?

MARY ANN (*reassuringly.*) Yes, sir. (*Lights his candle and gives it to him.*)

JIM (*at c. joyously*). I'm all right. (*Takes candle.*) I'm all right—don't want to lean on you—— (*Sings.*)

“ My spirit is summoned above—”

(*Catches sight of medley of dirty boots, and covers eyes with hand, then reassures himself.*) I'm all right, I'm all right, that's only one—dirty pair of boots, isn't it, Mary Ann ? Only one pair of boots, eh ?

MARY ANN (*at R.C.*). I wish it was, sir. (*Crosses to him and helps him upstairs.*)

(*He sings “ Kiss me good-night.”*)

(*Noise of cab driving up, and Lancelot's voice calls out, “ Whoa there ! ” After a pause a latchkey is heard in lock, door half opens*

*and LANCELOT is seen, a tall, handsome young man in rough artistic tweeds, with artistic hair and fingers.)*

LANCELOT. Well, good night, Peter. Glad we met again. So good of you to give me a lift. Good night.

(Enter LANCELOT with umbrella. PETER half pushing in behind him.

PETER in evening dress—elegant opera cape, opera hat—short, squat, the Sancho Panza to LANCELOT'S Don Quixote.)

PETER. No, not good night, Lancelot. I've got heaps more to yarn about—after all these years.

LANCELOT. I'm sorry I can't ask you in. I've nowhere to receive visitors.

PETER. Nowhere to receive visitors? What the devil are you making such a fuss about?

LANCELOT. Hush! Everybody's asleep.

PETER. Rot! (Forces himself in.) Why, here's a chair. (Plumps into hall chair below door.) And a better one than we had in our German garret. (Closes opera hat with a decisive snap.)

LANCELOT (flapping his hat angrily on a peg). Our garret at Leipsic was sanctified by music, by inspiration. All around one heard violins, pianos, harps, fresh young singing voices, everywhere was the atmosphere of art.

PETER. And garlic.

LANCELOT. Better than the boiled cabbage of British apartments. Pah! Stale and heavy as that British opera to-night. And here's a miserable light. (Angrily turns hall lamp much higher.) Ach Himmel, what a country! (Digs his umbrella savagely into the stand.) And look there! (Indicates MARY ANN, who just appears on landing above and is descending.) Look at that creature with her smuts, and think of the rosy-faced Fräuleins of the Fatherland!

PETER (down R., rising, looking). I think she's rather pretty.

LANCELOT (up R.C.). That's what you said of to-night's opera, you old stall-fed ox. But we didn't think so in the gallery, I can tell you. We just booed.

PETER. Sounds as if you were the oxen. You've got German measles. Let me help you off with your coat. (Takes LANCELOT'S coat and hangs it on rack.) (LANCELOT to MARY ANN, who has come to a standstill at the foot of the stairs, and is staring awestruck at the extravagantly burning gas). Well, Polly, Betsy, Jane, or whatever your name may be, what are you waiting for?

MARY ANN (tearfully). Please, sir, to fasten up and turn out that gas.

LANCELOT (at R.C., crossly). Well, you can't just yet.

PETER (crossing down L.—kindly). All right, my child, I'll see he does it.

MARY ANN. Oh, don't, please, sir, there's the ladies—

PETER. Ah, ladies live here too ?

MARY ANN (*at c.*). Yessir, very grand ladies. The Sisters Trippet from the theatre—I mean theaytre.

PETER. No, you don't, you mean the music hall. They're not really sisters, are they ?

LANCELOT (*grimly*). Step-dance sisters ! You see what I've come to. (*Stumbles against boots.*) And what in the name of England, home and beauty, are these beastly boots doing ! (*Kicks them.*)

MARY ANN (*at c.*). Please, sir, I'm taking them up to clean. (*Gathers them up in apron.*)

LANCELOT (*R.C.*). Well, hurry up, and clean your face too, while you are about it.

PETER (*at L.C., bustling to pick up a remote boot and put it in MARY ANN's lap.*). There you are, Polly. Is that your name ?

MARY ANN. No, sir. Mary Ann.

PETER. Mary Ann what ?

MARY ANN. Mary Ann ; that's all, sir.

PETER. Merely Mary Ann ?

MARY ANN. Yes, sir.

LANCELOT (*dropping on chair R.*). Ah, Peter, when in the ecstasy of composition we would deem ourselves Gods, these are the Hebes a mocking fate sends up with our tea.

(MARY ANN *starts to go.*)

By the way, Mary Ann, I'm hiring a better piano—it's coming in on Monday—a grand piano—I suppose it will have to come up through the window—these staircases are so beastly narrow. Do you never have a stout lodger, I wonder ?

MARY ANN (*up c.*). Oh, yes, sir. Some time ago we had quite a fat gentleman.

LANCELOT (*at R.*). Ah ! And did he go up through the window by a pulley ?

MARY ANN. No, sir. He lived on the ground floor.

PETER (*L.*). Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

LANCELOT (*getting up and coming towards MARY ANN.*). Shut up, you hyena, you'll wake up the house. Anyhow, you know what a piano is ; I suppose you'd know it from a kangaroo ?

MARY ANN (*c.*). Yes, sir. A kangaroo could get upstairs of itself.

PETER. Ha ! Ha !

LANCELOT (*disconcerted*). Oh, you've seen a kangaroo, have you ?

MARY ANN. Oh, yes, sir, it came to the village fair in a circus. A beastly with the jumps.

LANCELOT. Oh, then, since you know so much, perhaps you can play the piano too ?

MARY ANN (*at c.—blushing and hanging her head*). No, sir, missus never showed me how to do that.

LANCELOT (*at r.c.*). Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! This is a real original. But you would be willing to play——?

MARY ANN (*tearfully*). Please, sir, it does play a little when I dust it.

PETER (*at l.c.*). Oh, let the child go to bed. Good night, Mary Ann.

MARY ANN. Good night, sir. (*Ascends with the boots.*)

LANCELOT. Here ! Put out the whisky and a couple of glasses in my room as you go up.

MARY ANN. Yessir.

(*Hastens up to his room's door and exit through it.*)

PETER (*crossing over to LANCELOT*). I say, Lancelot, adversity doesn't seem to agree with you. You quite made that poor child's cheeks wet.

LANCELOT. It will wash away her smuts. Did you see her hands —black and red like lobsters ? Ugh ! Why doesn't she wear gloves ? (*Turns towards table.*)

PETER. Wear gloves ! You are too funny, Lancelot. Ah, how you aristocrats do hate the poor ! No wonder there are French Revolutions.

LANCELOT. Hallo ! (*Catches sight of a letter.*) Confound Mary Ann. Here's an express letter waiting all this time.

PETER. Oh, no hurry. It's only from me.

LANCELOT. From you ?

PETER. Yes, I forgot to post it till after the opera, so I got a messenger boy, little thinking I should walk right into you the moment after. Life is too funny. After hunting for you for years, I stumble on your address this morning at Brahmson's, and to-night——

LANCELOT. Brahmson's ? The music publisher ? What were *you* doing there ? You said you'd chuck'd music !

PETER. (*moving to l.c., uneasy*). Oh—I—you see he's a chum of mine. And so he was telling me——

LANCELOT (*at r.c.*). He was *telling* you ? Is he visible ? Does he really exist ? Has he a body ?

PETER. Ha ! Ha ! Has Brahmson a body ? I should say he has ; the kind that would have to come up through the window by a pulley.

LANCELOT. Never once have I been able to get at him—such a prickly hedge of clerks.

PETER. Ha ! Ha ! But your abusive letters have got at him—he says he thinks you have hurled at him even more abuse than manuscripts.

MARY ANN (*passing out of LANCELOT's room on upward way*). I've put the whisky out, sir.

(*Exit upstairs.*)

LANCELOT. But Brahmson doesn't know my real name—only Mr. Lancelot. How did you get to know it was I ?

PETER. By the good music and the bad language.

LANCELOT. Then why doesn't he publish it ?

PETER. The bad language ?

LANCELOT. Go to blazes ! (*Moves to down R., begins to tear open letter.*)

PETER (*anxiously*). No, no. (*Following over a little.*) No need to read it now—wait till I've gone.

LANCELOT. And did he tell you about my sonata that he's gone and lost ?

PETER. Brahmson never loses, not even money.

LANCELOT. Then why won't he publish it ?

PETER. I just told you—he never loses money. Don't swear—you ought to love him. He's a German. I prefer the Scotch—and I'm going to get it.

(*Goes towards the stairs, ascends a couple noisily.*)

LANCELOT (*moving up stage*). Hush ! People are asleep.

PETER. Not so many stairs as at Leipsic, old man, nicht wahr ?

LANCELOT. No, mein lieber, there were ninety-seven.

PETER. Ninety-six ; I used to count them.

LANCELOT. Ninety-seven. I remember it rhymed with Heaven.

PETER (*turning and looking down*). I hope you've forgiven me, lieber Lancelot, for my fall from Heaven.

LANCELOT. I've nothing to forgive. (*Takes up his candle.*) If you chose to chuck up music and go into business, that's your own affair.

PETER (*pleadingly*). Most of us do it sooner or later.

LANCELOT. You're right—look at to-night's opera. That chap's gone into business with a vengeance. And I did think once he might be the Saviour of British Music. (*Prepares to strike a match—it goes out.*)

PETER. Never mind—the place is open for you.

LANCELOT (*strikes a match*). Bah, the British public is not worth writing for ! Keeley Lesterre is all they're fit for. (*Mockingly and mincingly.*)

"Kiss me, dear love, good night,  
Dream of the old delight."

Ugh ! It's like treacle. (*His match goes out—he strikes another.*)

PETER. There are worse things than treacle. To tell the truth, I am—(*checks himself*) an admirer of Keeley Lesterre.

LANCELOT (*lighting his candle*). I see you are fast qualifying for a musical critic.

(*Street door opens with a dash, and LANCELOT's candle is blown out by the entry of the SISTERS TRIPPEL, who speak rapidly as they come in, scarcely noticing LANCELOT's exclamation which follows.*)

LANCELOT. The devil !

POLLY. She didn't get a hand.

KITTY. She can't dance for nuts.

POLLY. She'll be all right for the provs.

KITTY. And wanted to be starred bigger than us.

POLLY. Cheek !

KITTY AND POLLY (*they have been throwing off cloaks and revealing elaborate beauties and toilettes and suggesting anything but sisterhood. Now speaking in different keys as they perceive they've blown out LANCELOT'S light.*) Awfully sorry.

(LANCELOT turns his back rudely on them and fumbles nervously at the letter, trying to open it. PETER, half-way up the stairs, turns and looks at newcomers.)

POLLY. Lovely night after the rain. (*Repeats.*) Isn't it a lovely night after the rain ? (*Crosses up to table.*)

(LANCELOT grunts.)

A postcard for you, Kitty !

KITTY (*lighting candle*). Only a measly postcard ? Oh, Polly, we forgot to buy the cigarettes. (*Comes down R.C.*)

POLLY (c.). Good Lord ! And everything's shut.

PETER. Can I oblige you ? (*Descends stairs, crosses to L.C.—takes out cigarette-case.*) I have lots.

(LANCELOT stamps his foot.)

KITTY AND POLLY. Thanks, awfully.

KITTY (R.C.). You living here ?

PETER (L.C.). No. Just seeing my friend.

POLLY (c.—coquettishly). I'm so sorry.

PETER. So am I.

(LANCELOT moves towards L., tears at letter savagely. The SISTERS light their candle. KITTY lights LANCELOT'S.)

KITTY. I've lit your candle again.

(LANCELOT does not reply. The SISTERS ascend.)

KITTY (*looking back—to PETER*). I wish you'd get your pal to write us music for a dance.

LANCELOT (*down L.—cursing deeply*). God forbid !

POLLY. For money, not for love.

KITTY. We ain't mean—we'd pay a guinea.

LANCELOT (*grinding his teeth*). Donner und Blitzen

KITTY AND POLLY (*up the stairs*). Good night.

PETER (R.C.). Good night.

KITTY (*calls down to PETER*). I say, old fellow, you'd better put a poultice on your pal's head—take down the swelling. (*Leans*

*over balustrade, to LANCELOT, near kitchen door.) O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo ?*

(SISTERS disappear laughing.)

(PETER throwing kisses up to them.)

LANCELOT (*pausing with opened but unread letter*). I'm ashamed of you, Peter.

PETER. What's up ? Can't I do a Christian kindness ?

LANCELOT. Christian kindness ! All they wanted was to flirt—they've got trunks of cigarettes—and all you wanted was to flirt.

PETER. All right—don't bite my head off—I'm not a monster of perfection like you.

LANCELOT. Bah ! Where's your self-respect ? (*Still growling, draws out cheque.*) What's this ? (*Peruses letter.*)

PETER. Oh, er—(*takes out his cigarette case, drops it nervously, picks it up, takes out cigarette, drops it, picks it up, tries to light it*)—the money you lent me.

LANCELOT (*looking up, hisses in white heat*). How dare you !

PETER (R.C., *dropping the match*). What ! Mustn't I smoke ?

LANCELOT (L.C.). You may smoke in Hades, you confounded counter-jumper ! A cheque for two hundred and fifty pounds.

PETER (*apologetically*). Hush ! Hush ! I've only added interest at five per cent.

LANCELOT. Interest ! That's the last straw ! Because I'm reduced to Trippet Sisters and Mary Anns, you——

PETER. It's your own money.

LANCELOT. Am I a moneylender ? I gave you the money.

PETER. You did, Lancelot—most magnificently. You paid for your old school-fellow's training at Leipsic when his commercial papa offered him an office stool or starvation. You were a baronet's son, I was a tea-merchant's, yet you——

LANCELOT (*graciously*). Art is a republic.

PETER. Then let me be even with you. In those youthful days of revolt against our "stern parients," when you wouldn't go into the Church, and I wouldn't go into the City, everything was clouded in a magnificent mist. But now I see more straight. Where's my self-respect, you ask. You rob me of it if you don't take my cheque. Since I did the prodigal son dodge, I am simply rolling in money.

LANCELOT. Roll on—what's that to me ? (*Tears cheque and strews it into a score of fragments.*)

PETER (*dolefully as he stoops*). Oh, dear, more work for Mary Ann ! (*Crawls picking up pieces.*)

LANCELOT. And now you can just roll home—(*crosses to dining-room door and takes down whistle from it*)—I'll call a hansom. (*Opens hall door.*)

PETER. But see, I'm on my knees to you—I'm taking back my money—(*picks up pieces*)—every bit of it.

(*LANCELOT remorselessly whistles for a cab. PETER jumps up and drags him in, struggling, half-laughing, half-serious.*)

You're a blithering, bloated aristocrat; you're just wallowing in pride.

LANCELOT. Hush! You'll wake the house.

PETER. Beastly patrician pride. And this is my French Revolution. (*Forces him into chair below door R.*)

LANCELOT (*half angry—half laughing*). You bourgeois bully! You haven't lost your muscle since we wrestled in our German garret.

PETER. Beware then—or you'll be wiped out—— By the way—(*crosses to c.*)—how is your big brother, the baronet? Has he married an American heiress yet?

LANCELOT. Heaven forbid! (*Rising, hangs whistle on door, then comes down stage again.*) We marry a girl whose father has struck ile! Ugh!

PETER. Why not? The girl's polished with the oil.

LANCELOT. Reeking with it, you mean. No, Peter, in our family we marry ladies.

PETER. Yes, but what do you call a lady?

LANCELOT. Mary Ann!

(MARY ANN is seen on landing, holding candle, her face washed.)

MARY ANN. Yessir. I only came for to turn out that gas. (*Staring wistfully at its extravagant flare.*)

LANCELOT. My friend hasn't gone yet.

PETER. Hasn't come yet, you mean. (*Moves towards stairs.*) Let's have one drink for Leipsic and auld lang syne—and then I'll skedaddle. I know Mary Ann won't sleep till I'm off her mind, will you?

MARY ANN. No, sir, I promised missus.

LANCELOT. Well, come along, Peter. (*Takes candle from table.*)

(*They go up. As they mount, a passing chorus of male voices in the street, accompanied by a concertina, commences "Kiss me good-night, dear love." Start singing very low R., gradually louder and die away in distance L. LANCELOT makes a face.*)

Oh, these Saturday-night street ruffians!

PETER. They might be doing worse.

(*Exeunt into LANCELOT's room. Street chorus is continued.*

" Dream of the old delight,  
My spirit is summoned above,  
Kiss me, dear love, good-night."

*And when finished, re-starts, dying away in the distance. MARY ANN listens, emotionally entranced, humming chorus, puts her candle on*

*table, picks up remaining bits of cheque, lastly takes up the brush and vigorously brushes LANCELOT's coat as it hangs in the hall. LANCELOT and PETER are heard drinking, crying "Prosit," and winding up with "Gaudeamus Igitur." The joyous student-song mingles with the close of the street-song. As they emerge, PETER comically finishes the song like an opera singer, but LANCELOT silences him abruptly by reminding him with a gesture that the house is asleep.)*

PETER. So that's a bargain—you'll dine with me next Tuesday. Happy thought. Why not invite Brahmson to meet you?

LANCELOT (*angrily*). Damnable thought. If Brahmson won't take my music on its merits, I'll have none of your sly underhand patronizing tricks; none of your d——d dodges (*pushing him half playfully down remaining stairs*), do you hear, Peter?

PETER (*jumping down R.C.*). Yes, I hear—but I'd rather hear your music. Even I couldn't induce Brahmson to bring out new-fangled stuff like yours—so you needn't be alarmed. Lancelot, I'm afraid you're in for a terrible fight. And even genius doesn't always win. How are you to live?

LANCELOT. One can always die.

PETER. That seems such a waste of time—especially when there is that two hundred and fifty—yes, don't kick me. Good night, old chap. (*Opens his opera hat with a plop, and takes umbrella from stand.*)

LANCELOT. Good night, lieber Peter. (*Places candle on table. Puts hand on PETER's shoulder, as they move slowly towards the door, passing MARY ANN without noticing her.*) I forgive you for that cheque—you've brought me such pleasant memories of our dear old garret. I see the Heinstrasse and the quaint tall houses, and hear again the first whispers of fame and love—it's all flowing through my brain in fluttering chords and spring-like melodies.

PETER. Then write them down at once, old chap. Lebt wohl! (*Opens door and glides off.*)

LANCELOT. Auf Wiederssehen!

PETER. Auf Wiedersehen! (*Outside.*)

LANCELOT (*stands sentimentally at door looking out*). Lieber Peter!

(*Bell ready up R.*)

(*A longish pause—Silence—MARY ANN watching him lovingly. A church clock slowly booms twelve.*)

LANCELOT. Ah, midnight. (*Turns pensively. In surprise.*) Mary Ann!

MARY ANN (*c.*). Yessir.

LANCELOT (*R.C.*). I'm so sorry—I didn't mean to keep you waiting—you must be dying for bed. (*Going up stairs.*)

MARY ANN. No, sir, I could wait up for hours, if— (*Flushes.*)

LANCELOT. If what, my child? (*Pauses on stairs and turns head.*)

MARY ANN (L.C.). If you was going to play the music you told Mr. Peter about.

LANCELOT (*blankly*). The music I told Peter——

MARY ANN. That's in your brain. The fluttering strings and springy tunes.

LANCELOT (*interested, laughing*). If I played it now?

MARY ANN (*moving to R.C.*). Yessir.

LANCELOT (*coming to L.C.*). And how about your sleep?

MARY ANN. Please, sir, it's better than sleep.

LANCELOT. I'm afraid the rest of the house wouldn't think so.

MARY ANN. You could play very soft, sir.

LANCELOT. So you've got an ear.

MARY ANN. Yessir.

LANCELOT. A pretty ear, too.

MARY ANN. Yessir.

LANCELOT. Ah, you know you're pretty.

MARY ANN. Yessir. The vicar of our village told me that was why Mrs. Leadbatter must take care of me.

LANCELOT. Ah, the village where the kangaroo came.

MARY ANN. Yessir. Mr. Smedge.

LANCELOT. I'm glad you're a country girl—I hope you went a-milking?

MARY ANN (*enthusiastically relapsing into her dialect*). Eessir! And I did drive the milk-cart, and I did ride on a pony to the second pasture to count the sheep and heifers.

LANCELOT. Then you are a farmer's daughter?

MARY ANN. Eessir. My feyther had only fower little fields, but we had a niceish garden with plum trees and gillyflowers and roses.

LANCELOT. Better and better. The roses haven't quite faded yet. (*Strokes her cheeks.*) How old were you when you came to London?

MARY ANN (*puzzling it out*). I were eight years old when mother died, and thirteen when feyther died.

LANCELOT. And how old are you now?

MARY ANN. I—I don't know, sir. I'll ask missus.

LANCELOT. And whatever she tells you, you'll be.

MARY ANN. Yessir.

LANCELOT. Oh dear, what a funny little Topsy! (*Crosses her and moves to R.*)

MARY ANN. I'm not topsy-turvey, I haven't kept count.

LANCELOT (*turning to her*). What! No birthdays?

MARY ANN (L.C.). Only Miss Rosie's; I always do her work on her birthday.

LANCELOT. What a shame!

MARY ANN. Oh, it only comes once a year, sir.

LANCELOT. Like Christmas.

MARY ANN. Oh, no sir, not so heavy as Christmas. And last year I don't think Miss Rosie's birthday did come at all.

LANCELOT. Ah, she's taking a year off !

MARY ANN. Yessir.

(Both laugh.)

LANCELOT. But your own birthdays—

MARY ANN. There's no one to keep those, sir.

LANCELOT. Then you are quite alone in the world ?

MARY ANN. No, sir. (Moves up to him R.) There's my canary. They sold everything when feyther died, but I did cry so the vicar's wife she did buy Dick back for me.

LANCELOT. But haven't you any brothers and sisters ?

MARY ANN. Little Sally, she died. And my big brother Tom I never did see. Oh, but I mustn't mention his name, mother said.

LANCELOT. Mustn't mention his name ? Why ?

MARY ANN (half weeping). He's so wicked. He wouldn't go to church.

LANCELOT. Dear me !

MARY ANN. No, sir—or if he did, mother said, he coughed so loud—all make-believe—that he had to be sent out. He led a bad life, sir, and now he's in America.

LANCELOT. Serve him right. Poor lonely little Mary Ann ! (Draws her towards him.) I'm sorry I spoke so crossly to you before. There—there. (Kisses her. She retreats shyly.) Oh, don't run away. (He takes her hands—then as he feels their roughness, makes a grimace and says) I shall have to buy you a pair of gloves.

MARY ANN. Oh, sir ! (Then disappointed.) But I never goes out !

LANCELOT. I never go out.

MARY ANN. I never go out.

LANCELOT. That doesn't matter. I want you to wear themindoors.

MARY ANN. But what'd missus say ?

LANCELOT. Missus needn't see them. You shall only wear them when you come to me.

MARY ANN. Oh, thank you, sir, that will be grand !

LANCELOT (holding her in his arms). And if there is anything else I can do to help a poor little girl—

MARY ANN. Oh, sir, if you would be so good ! (Breaks from his arms.) Wait a moment, sir. (Rushes up stairs two at a time.)

LANCELOT. What the devil ! (Stares after her. Then with sudden transition.) Good God ! What have I done ? (Takes out handkerchief and wipes lips.) To sink to a Mary Ann. Faugh ! (Rubsvigorously.) I must have drunk too much whisky. (Paces agitatedly.) And I slanged Peter for talking to the Sisters Trippet . . . ! Whatever does she want me to do ?

(MARY ANN *rushes back, holding a large canary cage.*)

MARY ANN. Please, sir, would you let my canary stay in your room?

LANCELOT (*amazed*). Your canary?

MARY ANN. Yessir. Missus don't like him in mine. And there's more air and sunshine in yours, and such a nice nail for the cage.

LANCELOT (*impatiently*). Oh, hang your canary!

MARY ANN. Thank you, sir. (*Hastens up to his room and exit through the door.*)

LANCELOT. A pretty mess I've got into! Already she's given me a keepsake. A keepsake from Mary Ann! Oh, Peter, Peter, why did you come and make me sentimental—and semi-sober! (*Wipes mouth nervously again.*)

MARY ANN (*re-enters, runs downstairs*). Please, sir, I'm so happy, and so is the canary.

LANCELOT (*sullenly*). I hope he won't chortle in his joy. (*Crosses to stairs.*)

MARY ANN. No, sir, I talked to he.

(LANCELOT turns saying "Eh?")

I mean to hit.

LANCELOT (*brusquely*). All right—good night.

(Exit up stairs into room.)

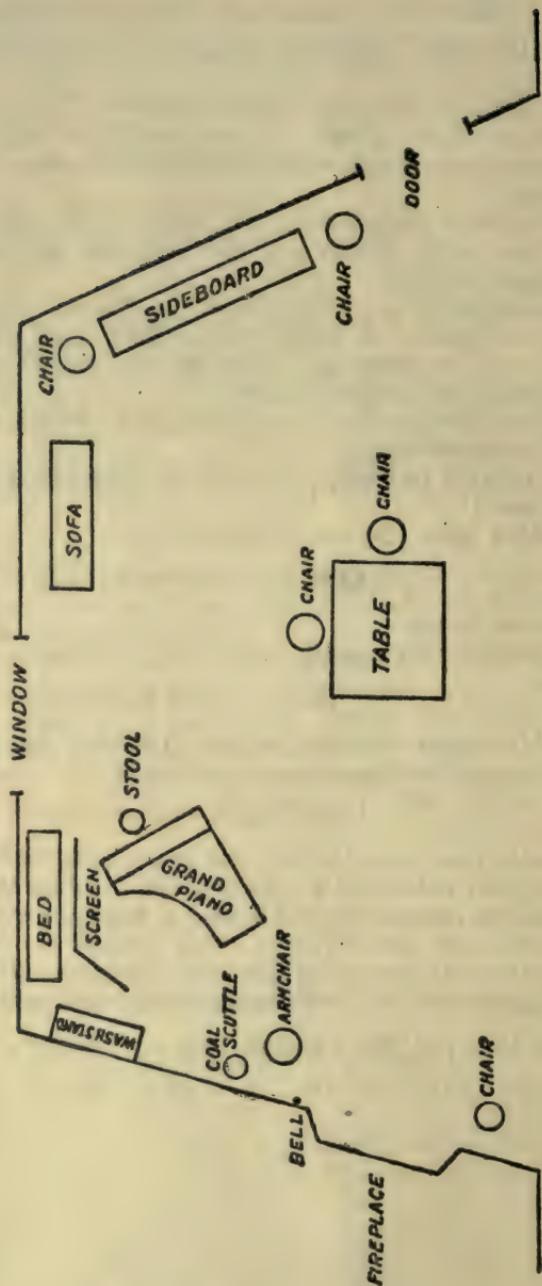
MARY ANN. Good night, sir. (*Watches him upstairs till he disappears, then begins humming happily*)

"Kiss me good-night, dear love."

*She locks and bolts the door and puts up the chain. As she stands on chair to turn out gas, his door opens and his boots are thrown out with an angry crash, and the door is banged as with a curse. MARY ANN turns out hall lamp, slowly ascends the stairs, her candle making the one spot of light in the darkness. She stumbles against LANCELOT'S boots midway and kneels to pick them up.)*

God bless you, Mr. Lancelot, and my canary!

ACTS 2 AND 3.  
HOUSE Top Backing.



## ACT II

SCENE.—LANCELOT's bed-sitting room, furnished heavily in lodging-house style, antimacassars on furniture, and bad pictures hanging. The sideboard is ugly. At the back are a pallet bed and washing stand, the former hidden absolutely by a tall screen, in which a quill pen is stuck. There is a mirror on the mantelpiece. The large table is covered with litter of manuscripts and printed music, magazines, books, etc. Same litter everywhere. Duplicate quill pen in coal scuttle. The canary cage is hung on the left side of the window.

*It is late afternoon, the light gradually fading. LANCELOT is discovered sitting despondently playing at the piano. The canary's rapturous singing holds the stage a moment or two. It must rarely die abruptly throughout the scene and may sometimes go advantageously with passages of dialogue, like an orchestral accompaniment. The specially obligatory outbursts of song are indicated in their place.*

LANCELOT (*to canary*). Shut up! (*To himself*.) How would this do for the coda? (*Plays a few bars. The canary only gradually ceases its trills.*) Ach, waiting for that telegram unnerves me! Will that telegram never come? (*Leans head on keyboard.*)

ROSIE (*knocking and entering with a large note on a tray. He does not notice her*). Good afternoon, Mr. Lancelot.

LANCELOT (*sitting up galvanized*). Ah, is that my wire?

ROSIE. No, sir, your bill. (*Crosses to him.*)

LANCELOT. Oh! (*Collapses again.*)

ROSIE. For six weeks. (*LANCELOT takes it up.*) And Ma instructed me to say she is unhappily compelled to ask for immediate payment, but hopes you will not take it as an expression of the faintest distrust since she has the completest confidence in the word of a true gentleman, but it is merely to be regarded as a painful necessity consequent on her own quarterly bills coming in.

LANCELOT. Ha! (*Opens it.*)

ROSIE (*goes to canary and feeds it*). How is my pet? Didems now? Tune up now, you ungrateful little beast.

LANCELOT (*feels in his pockets, turns them out gloomily, rises, picks up an MS.*). I suppose your mother hasn't got change for a sonata in D minor?

ROSIE. A what, sir? (*Comes down a little L.C.*)

LANCELOT. Never mind. In a few years this may be worth a hundred times your bill; it may be circulating when the coins of Victoria are called in, and yet to-day— (*Throws it down angrily.*)

ROSIE. I'll ask her, Mr. Lancelot.

LANCELOT (*taking up another*). Tell your mother this symphony in B flat major is to be performed at the Queen's Hall this season.

ROSIE (*L.C.*). What date, sir?

LANCELOT. That's what I'm expecting a wire about every instant from Gasco, and then—(*drops on stool again*)—I ought to be able to get some money. (*He plays.*)

ROSIE. I hope you will, Mr. Lancelot, I do hope you will—(*crosses towards door*)—for—(*shyly*)—we should miss you.

(*Hasty exit.*)

LANCELOT (*he stops playing and jumps up*). Was that a threat? I'm to be chucked. Even Mary Ann's place is safer. (*Rat-a-tat, rat-a-tat downstairs*) Ah, the telegram from Gasco at last! (*Strides agitatedly up and down the room. Finally MARY ANN knocks. He is now near the fire.*) Come in!

(MARY ANN *opens door and closes it behind her, puts letter-tray on chair, produces gloves from her pocket and begins slowly putting them on.*)

(*Testily.*) What are you doing?

MARY ANN. Please, sir, pulling on my gloves.

LANCELOT (*stamping foot with impatience*). Yes, yes, but not when there's a wire. (*Rushes towards tray.*)

MARY ANN (*dropping gloves in agitation, seizing the tray and presenting it respectfully*). But you said I was always to put them on inside your door.

LANCELOT. Silly! Not when there is a wire. (*Tears it open.*) MARY ANN *picks up gloves.*) The devil!

MARY ANN (*nearly in tears*). Yessir.

(*She is going.*)

LANCELOT. Here, wait. Reply prepaid.

MARY ANN. Yessir.

LANCELOT. I needn't have been in such a hurry; it's not the one I was expecting. You may put on your gloves. (*Crosses to R.C.*)

MARY ANN. Thank you, sir. (*Begins to pull them on.*)

LANCELOT. Poor little Mary Ann! It's only from Peter—you know Peter?

MARY ANN. Yessir, the nice, kind gentleman—

LANCELOT. Ah—(*walks away to R. up and down*)—not the nasty wild beast that I am!

MARY ANN. Please, sir, wild beasts are not nasty. I liked the lion in the circus—and you walk about like the lion did—up and down his cage, up and down.

LANCELOT (*laughing, leaning on piano*). I'm like a caged lion, eh?

MARY ANN (*smiling up at him*). Yessir, I often wish you had a tail to lash.

LANCELOT. A tail!

MARY ANN. Yessir. You've only got your hair to tear, and that must hurt, sir.

LANCELOT. Ha ! Ha ! So you pity the poor caged lion without a tail! (*Comes down R. of table*.)

MARY ANN (*smiling*). But you can roar, sir.

LANCELOT. Ha ! Ha ! Does that frighten my little girl? (*Leans on table*.)

MARY ANN. No, sir, I am glad. Because the more you roar, the more you write the lovely music. Oh, yes, sir, I quite prefer you roary.

LANCELOT. Do I write best when I'm roary?

MARY ANN. Oh my, sir! The moment I hear you growling I fill up the inkstand, and hunt around for your pen.

LANCELOT. Why, isn't my pen always on the table?

MARY ANN (*at L.C., laughing*). Oh, no, sir. I do wish, sir, you would aim near the fender, because I can mend the quill, but it's more trouble to take the ink out of the carpet.

LANCELOT. I'm sorry, Mary Ann. I didn't know I threw my pen about.

MARY ANN. I don't mind, sir, it's only the missus—at least I do tremble sometimes for the canary.

LANCELOT. My pen couldn't go through the wires.

MARY ANN. No, sir, not if you tried for it. But it's wonderful the places I have picked up that pen in. My, here it is now, sticking in the screen like an arrow— (*Picks it up, points it with her scissors—comes down R. close to him*).

LANCELOT. Ach Himmel! It's very kind of you. (*Sticks point in his hair and sits on bottom R. end of table*.) You're quite my good fairy, aren't you?

MARY ANN. No, sir, I do try to be good, but I can't be a fairy—I haven't got wings.

LANCELOT (*his arms round her*). Why, what would you do with wings? (*Smiling*.)

MARY ANN. Flap them and fly away to the green country.

LANCELOT. Without me? (*Kissing her*.)

MARY ANN. Oh, no, sir; you've learnt me to talk like a gentleman, and to wear gloves like a lady.

LANCELOT. You never kiss anybody but me?

MARY ANN. No, Mr. Lancelot, and I never shall, sir, never.

LANCELOT (*dropping her uneasily*). The telegraph boy will be fuming. (*Crosses down R. to fireplace*.)

MARY ANN. Not he, sir; he likes his leisure.

LANCELOT (*smiling and re-reading telegram*). Peter wants to bring Brahmson here to tea.

MARY ANN. Yessir.

LANCELOT. The great music publisher.

MARY ANN. Yessir.

LANCELOT (*glumly*). And Peter tells me Brahmson is sending back all my MSS.

MARY ANN (*outburst of joy*). I'm so glad, sir. (*Crosses to c.*)

LANCELOT. You don't understand. Brahmson's a Philistine.

MARY ANN. What, sir, out of the Bible? (*L.C.*)

LANCELOT. Never mind—too difficult for you. A Brute.

MARY ANN. Yessir.

LANCELOT (*half to himself—moves up*). But I don't like Brahmson coming here and seeing my bed. (*Looks morbidly towards screen*.)

MARY ANN (*reassuringly*). Please, sir, I put clean sheets this morning.

LANCELOT. You little goose! (*Moves down to top of table*.) But I can't lose the opportunity of giving Brahmson a piece of my mind.

MARY ANN. Yes, skim it off the top, sir—it will do you good. Oh, dear, I do wish you had a tail to lash. (*Moves L.*)

LANCELOT. Where is my pen? Mary Ann, what have you done with my pen? It's never where I put it.

MARY ANN. Yes, it is, sir. (*Draws it out of his hair. Bus.*

MARY ANN *humming* "Kiss me good-night," etc.)

(LANCELOT takes it and writes on the reply telegram.)

LANCELOT. There! (*Gives it to her on tray*.)

MARY ANN (*taking it*). Yessir. (*At door she draws off her gloves before her exit*.)

CANARY. Two, two!

LANCELOT. Shut up! (*Rises and goes up to cage*.) She thinks I adore you—just as she never suspects the gloves are to hide her red hands. Oh, what a hypocrite I'm becoming. (*Moves down R.*)

(A little pause, then a timid knock.)

MARY ANN (*enters holding the reply telegram in one gloved hand, the other carefully behind her*). Please, sir, the telegraph boy says it's sixpence more—only sixpence prepaid.

LANCELOT (*crossing to her c. and taking it*). Oh, dear, am I not an ass!

MARY ANN (*L.C.*). You can't help it, sir. You're so clever!

LANCELOT. You wound and heal in one. But have I got sixpence? (*Feeling in pocket*.) No, not a copper. Haven't you got sixpence, Mary Ann?

MARY ANN. No, sir—once I had ninepence,

(LANCELOT sits impatiently L. of table.)

all in threepenny pieces, but the vicar, he did give me such a holy lecture that I did give my ninepence for the black people in Africa—to wash their souls, you know, sir. But next year missus is going to pay me wages—she is so good to me.

LANCELOT (*studying telegram*). Oh, everybody seems good to you.

MARY ANN. Yes, sir, everybody—except Miss Rosie.

LANCELOT. Rosie—what's the matter with Rosie?

MARY ANN. She will feed my canary.

LANCELOT. Well, but isn't that nice for the canary?

MARY ANN (*archly*). It's nicer for Miss Rosie.

LANCELOT. What are you hiding there?

MARY ANN. Nothing, sir.

LANCELOT. Yes, you are.

MARY ANN. Only my hand, sir— (*Shows it bare.*) I didn't know if I was to put on both gloves, being half a wire.

LANCELOT. Ha ! Ha ! So you hedged, one on, one off.

(*Both laugh.*)

MARY ANN. Yessir.

LANCELOT. Ha ! Ha ! Gives me an idea, I can take off half the telegram. (*Sits l. of table. Counts on fingers.*) "Pleased to see you and Brahmson, if only to give him a piece of my mind." Twelve words must go out. (*Scratches and writes.*) There ! Tell the boy, only those three words. Here ! You ought to be able to read them by now.

MARY ANN. Yessir. (*Reading painfully.*) "Bring—the—brute."

LANCELOT. Yes—that's shorter, sweeter and cheaper.

(*Both laugh.*)

(MARY ANN *draws off her glove, puts it in her pocket and exit.*)

Have I got any whisky for the beggars ? (*Opens sideboard, produces bottle—turns it upside down.*) Not a thimbleful. (*Dolefully swinging bottle.*) No whisky, no wire, no money, no work published, no— (*With tremendous transition.*) By Jove ! now I've got that coda.

(*His face afire with ecstasy, he seizes the pen and scribbles feverishly on a sheet of ruled paper, humming gently to himself. Suddenly a clarionet outside the window begins to play with many flourishes "Kiss me good-night, dear love, Dream of the old delight," etc. He hurls the pen on the table with an inarticulate roar, and jumps up.*)

If I hear that sickly sentimental stuff again, I shall burst. (*He rushes to window and throws it open.*)

(*The music is louder.*)

Go away !

(*The music continues.*)

He smiles up at me. Der Teufel ! No, I don't want an encore. Great Scott ! And I haven't a penny to throw to him. (*Looks round desperately. Tears hair. There is a knock at the door. He calls angrily in the new direction.*) Oh, let me alone !

(*The door opens and Mrs. LEADBATTER enters, followed by ROSIE.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Hexcuse me, sir, but Hi've let you alone for six weeks, and Hi—

LANCELOT. Give me a penny.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Give you a penny ?

LANCELOT (c.). Don't argue, give me a penny !

ROSIE (l.). Here you are, Mr. Lancelot.

LANCELOT (*clutches at it, hurls it into the street. The music ceases, and he closes the window with a bang.*) Thank you, that's all ! (*With a dismissing wave of the hand.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER (l.c.). That's hall ! And you're sure you don't want more than a penny of our 'ard-earned savings ?

ROSIE (l.). Hush, Ma !

MRS. LEADBATTER (*angrily*). Well, you talk to 'im then, you're a laidy. I'm only a 'ard-working widow. I 'ad to keep two 'usbands eating their 'eads off, and if I'd a wanted a third I'd a haxed 'im.

ROSIE. Oh, Ma ! (*Giggles.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Don't "Oh, Ma" me ! I've got a proposal to make, and I shall make it.

ROSIE (*in higher giggling key*). Oh, Ma !

LANCELOT. Yes, yes—what is your proposal ? Sit down.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Thank you, sir. (*Sits l. of table.*) Well, sir, I did think that you—that sleeping and heating and drinking 'ere for nothing all these weeks, you'd feel uncomfortable like, not being one of my 'usbands.

(*ROSIE, giggling, tugging at MRS. LEADBATTER'S sleeve.*)

LANCELOT (*frowning at ROSIE*). Quite so, quite so. It is uncomfortable.

MRS. LEADBATTER (*triumphantly*). You see, Rosie ! And so we thought you'd like to work it out.

LANCELOT. Work it out ! Help Mary Ann, you mean ?

ROSIE (*giggling*). Oh, no, sir ! What I suggested to Ma was—

MRS. LEADBATTER. Don't interrupt your holders. You see, sir, Rosie and me 'ave been thinking of taking lessons on the pianner—

LANCELOT. Rosie and you ?

ROSIE (*giggling*). Ma means only me.

LANCELOT. Oh !

MRS. LEADBATTER. Yes, I'm bringing hup Rosie to be a laidy.

LANCELOT. So I see. But have you got a piano of your own ?

MRS. LEADBATTER. Oh, no, sir.

LANCELOT. Well, but how is your Rosie to practise? Unless she practises several hours a day, my lessons would be wasted.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Ah, you don't know my Rosie. You mustn't judge her by hother gals—

ROSIE (*giggling*). Oh, Ma, you make me blush!

LANCELOT (R.C.). My good woman, I practised six hours a day myself.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Yes, but it don't come so natural to a man. It's like darning socks. You give Rosie lessons hevery day, and we'll arrange to leave you alone till your money comes in.

(LANCELOT paces agitatedly up and down.)

Well, sir, is it a bargain?

LANCELOT (*clenches his fist*). Yes—dirt cheap. Sit down!

(ROSIE goes up C., seizes music stool and plants it down with a jerk that sends it twirling round and round.)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*starting up*). Oh, not yet—I 'aven't time to stay now. I've four teas to make. (Crosses to door.) We'll come back after tea.

LANCELOT. But you're not both taking lessons?

MRS. LEADBATTER. Well, sir, Rosie couldn't very well be so long alone with a gentleman, could she?

ROSIE (*giggling*). Oh, Ma, you make me blush!

(*Exeunt.*)

(LANCELOT paces wildly up and down, then throws himself into his armchair in utter abandonment. A knock, he does not answer. Another knock; he makes no sign. The door opens, and MARY ANN enters with laden tray, deposits it on chair near door, and starts pulling on her gloves.)

LANCELOT (*looking up eagerly*). Ah, the wire from Gasco!

MARY ANN. No, sir. (Shows hands.) I've got them both on. And I've put three cups. (Turns and extracts small table-cloth from sideboard.)

LANCELOT. Three! Whom for?

MARY ANN. The gentlemen who are coming—Mr. Peter and the Brute.

LANCELOT. Oh, ah! (Laughing.) What thoughtfulness! Come here, child.

(MARY ANN, dropping cloth on sideboard, goes to his chair.)

(Taking her in his arms.) Oh, Mary Ann, I'm so miserable!

MARY ANN. Then hadn't you better have your pen, Mr. Lance-lot? (Breaks away to find pen and gives it to him.)

LANCELOT. Ah, you agree with Shelley. They learn in suffering what they teach in song, eh? (He pulls her gently down to him.)

MARY ANN (*kneeling by his chair*). Yessir. And the song stops the suffering. No matter what I'm doing, plates, or steps, or carpets, if your music is going . . . I feel back in the country, standing at sunset under the big ellum by the stream. Eh, my word, it was nice in the spring-time, with the bluebells— (*Looks up shyly*.)

LANCELOT (*patting her hair*). Yes, yes—go on—so my music takes you back to the green country.

MARY ANN (*ecstatically*). Eessir. That gives me the wings—and I flap 'em and am off—and—(*with growing ecstasy*)—when I heard the music outside just now—

LANCELOT (*shrieks*). What! (*Throws pen*.) Ach, Himmel! (*Goes across foot of table and up to window*.)

(MARY ANN jumps from his side in terror.)

MARY ANN. Oh, sir, you'd better have your pen, sir. (*Picks up pen again*.)

LANCELOT (*laughing*). No, no. Go on. (*Coming down c., leans on chair behind table*.) So you liked "Good-night and Good-bye"?

MARY ANN. Oughtn't I to ha' liked it, sir?

LANCELOT. Oh, yes—it's the correct thing. England is crazy over it. Keeley Lesterre—that's the lucky composer's name—has made a fortune by it. (*Moves to L. of table*.) His portrait is in all the magazines—here, look! (*Standing in front of table—shows MARY ANN magazine*.) Waving hair, rolling eyes, curling moustache, great white brow, and every girl who squalls "Kiss me good-night, dear love," is dying to kiss him. So you see you're quite in the fashion, aren't you?

MARY ANN. No, sir. I don't want to kiss him.

LANCELOT (*L.C., laughing*). You funny little Mary Ann, one forgives you everything, even admiration of Keeley Lesterre.

MARY ANN (*R.C.*). Please, sir, it's because the song makes me think of my mother.

LANCELOT. Eh?

MARY ANN. That's what she said to me when she died. Kiss, me, dear love, good-night. (*Breaks down*.)

LANCELOT. Now, now, don't cry. (*Crosses to fireplace*.)

MARY ANN. I'm not crying, sir. (*Begins clearing away litter from half the table in order to lay cloth*.) I am so happy when I think of her—of her and little Sally and feyther all together in Heaven. Only I was so silly when she laid dying, what do you think I did?

LANCELOT (*down R.*). Heaven knows. Offered her your canary? (*Leans on R. of piano*.)

MARY ANN (*behind table*). No, sir. But she kept saying she was going to little Sally, so I brought her flowers, and apples and bits of cake to take to little Sally with my love. I put them on her pillow, but the flowers faded, and the cake got mouldy—mother was such a long time dying—and at last—(*smiling through tears*)—I ate the apples myself. After a while she forgot about little Sally

and said she was going to see my big brother again—and I thought she was going to America—but her last words were—(*breaks down*)—like the song.

LANCELOT. Yes, yes, dear, you're quite right to like it. (*Turns to fireplace.*)

MARY ANN. And besides, it reminds me of you. (*Finishes clearing litter.*)

LANCELOT (*perturbed again*). Of me?

MARY ANN. Yes—you kiss me good-night.

LANCELOT (*uneasily*). Yes, yes, I know—but you mustn't talk about it. (*Crosses up R.C.*)

MARY ANN. No, sir—I only tell Dick.

LANCELOT (*alarmed*). Dick?

MARY ANN. My canary, sir. (*Spreads the cloth over half the table.*)

LANCELOT (*moving down R.*). Oh, ah, yes! I thought it might be your wicked brother.

MARY ANN. That's Tom, sir.

LANCELOT. Ah, yes, Tom. Well, it's lucky Dick isn't a parrot. (*Paces up R.*)

MARY ANN. You'd better have your pen, sir! (*Offers it again.*)

LANCELOT (*taking it*). You insist on my writing to-day?

MARY ANN. Yes, sir.

(*There is the violent ring of a bell. MARY ANN hastily runs over and fetches laden tray from chair and puts it on cloth.*)

Missus will be cross.

LANCELOT. Bother missus. Stay here.

MARY ANN (*smiling at him*). Oh, no, sir, I mustn't. I'll come back with the tea. (*Tears off gloves and dashes out.*)

LANCELOT. Dear little Mary Ann, you've given me my pen again—it's symbolic, for you are coming to me in music, translating yourself into rippling waves of sound, you and your sunset and your bluebells, and your big ellums by the river—

(*Listens with rapt expression as to an inward celestial symphony, then sits at table and scrawls in inspiration. Several knocks on the door. He pays no attention, but scribbles in feverish ecstasy. Door bursts open, revealing MRS. LEADBATTER and ROSIE.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*cheerfully*). 'Ere we are!

LANCELOT (*looking up*). What do you want? (*Writes on rhapsodically.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. We want to tune up.

ROSIE (*giggles*). Oh, Ma! (*Giggles.*)

LANCELOT (*hurling his pen away into the coal scuttle*). Come along, Rosie, up you tune. (*Angrily sets music stool whirling again.*)

ROSIE (*moves up to c.*). Do I go on the roundabouts?

MRS. LEADBATTER. Don't be frisky, Rosie. Wait till the stool stops.

LANCELOT. And you, Mrs. Leadbatter, where would you like to sit ?

MRS. LEADBATTER. It ain't as I feared to trust her with you, sir.

ROSIE. Oh, Ma !

MRS. LEADBATTER. For I knows, sir, you're a gentleman. But it's the neighbours—they'll talk so when I tell 'em about it. (*Sits chair l. by door.*)

ROSIE. Oh, Ma ! (*Giggles, sits on stool, striking the notes with one finger, producing a faint suggestion of "Daisy, Daisy," amid giggles.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*beamingly*). There, sir ! She makes it go. What did I tell you, sir ? She gets her music genius from her father ; he was a wonder on the concertina—you couldn't get him to stop.

LANCELOT (*on ROSIE's right*). You mustn't play with one finger. Begin with your first finger. Like this ! (*Plays scale.*)

(*ROSIE giggling tries the scale. Bus.*)

No, no, that's not your first finger—this—— (*Dabs her thumb on key.*)

ROSIE. That's my thumb, sir.

MRS. LEADBATTER. You don't call her thumbs fingers.

LANCELOT. No; I call her fingers thumbs.

(*Bus. LANCELOT biting his lips, his fingers working nervously.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. But, hexcoose me, sir, I don't hear no toons.

LANCELOT (*coming down to r. of MRS. LEADBATTER.*) Oh, it's tunes you want. (*Clenching his fist.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. What helse ?

CANARY. Sweet, sweet, etc.

MRS. LEADBATTER. There ! That bird's got more toon to hit !

LANCELOT. But Rosie can't be a canary at one jump.

MRS. LEADBATTER. You don't make a beginning, sir. Mrs. Robins, across the street, is marrying 'er heldest gal to a hironmonger next Monday, and I wanted Rosie to play at the wedding.

LANCELOT (*through his clenched teeth*). Well, what tune would you like ? Name your tune.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Oh, I'm not particular, so long as it's lively.

ROSIE. . Oh, no, Ma, I want to learn something classical.

LANCELOT (*placing a chair on ROSIE's left and sitting on it, grimly.*) Ah, classical——

ROSIE. Yes, like "Kiss me good-night, de——"

(*With a great wild-beast cry LANCELOT sweeps both hands over piano in fiendish discord. The canary screams. ROSIE and MRS. LEADBATTER jump up, the door bursts open and PETER rushes in. LANCELOT races over to him, and takes both his hands and almost falls into his arms.*)

LANCELOT. Peter ! Thank goodness ! (*Turns to ROSIE and*

MRS. LEADBATTER.) Later on, my good creatures, later on. (*Moves to window and opens it.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*angrily*). I'd 'ave you remember that Rosie hexpects to be treated like a laidy.

ROSIE (*giggling*). Oh, Ma ! (*Dragging her out.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. And I'm a 'ard-working widow and my hasthma is awful ; I can't trollop up and down stairs as I did when I first—

LANCELOT. Give me a little breathing space. (*Crosses down to fireplace.*)

PETER (*looking slowly up at ceiling and down at floor with comical wonder—L.C.*). I hope I didn't interrupt a proposal for Rosie's hand.

LANCELOT (*R.C., lights pipe*). Rosie's hand ! Beastly butter-fingered paw (*foot of table*). But you couldn't have got my reply telegram ?

PETER (*laughing*). I took that for granted, as we were coming whatever you said. We were playing whist at the club ; I made Brahmson go round to his office to have all your stuff swept together. I'm glad he hasn't taken the tiniest thing.

LANCELOT. Glad ? (*Moves a little to him.*)

PETER (*L.C.*). Yes, you'd have accused me of bribing him to publish it.

LANCELOT (*smiling, crosses to him*). I dare say I should. But he'll be sorry when he sees my Symphony in B flat Major is to be done at the Queen's Hall. (*Moves back to down R.*)

PETER. Oh, it is ? That's ripping. When ?

LANCELOT. I'm expecting to hear the date any instant from Gasco.

PETER (*groaning*). From Gasco ! Oh dear, I hope I shall live to hear your B flat Major. But my heart is not as good as it might be.

LANCELOT (*breaking down*). It certainly isn't. (*Turns away—sits on armchair R.*)

PETER. Poor Lancelot ! (*Crosses to R.C.*). Don't you know Gasco is short for Gas and Co. ? Ah ! how these artistic chaps do gas. Their promises are beautiful bubbles from soft soap, and made to burst. By the way, a little gas here would be an improvement. How short the days are getting ! (*Turns up C.*) Got a match, Lancelot ?

LANCELOT. Oh, Mary Ann always hides them somewhere. (*A knock.*) There she is with the tea.

PETER. Ah, I've got matches. (*Produces box from pocket.*)

LANCELOT. Come in !

(Enter MARY ANN, dimly seen with the teapot, which she places on chair.)

PETER (*strikes a match*. MARY ANN is brilliantly revealed drawing on gloves). Hallo ! (*Drops match.*)

LANCELOT (R.C., *abashed*). Clumsy ! You'll burn Mrs. Leadbatter's carpet.

(MARY ANN's hands are now bare again.)

PETER. What on earth were you putting on gloves for, my girl ?

(LANCELOT *flushes and turns away uneasily*.)

MARY ANN (*tearfully*). Please, sir, I've got to go out and I'm in a hurry !

PETER (L.C.). Then why did you take them off again ?

(MARY ANN *bursts into a flood of tears and runs from the room*.)

Now I've offended her. Did you see how she tossed her pretty head ? Why, she's left the teapot on the chair. What an odd girl !

LANCELOT (R.). She's got such a lot to do. (*Lights gas over the mantelpiece*.) I suppose she sometimes gets a bit queer in the head.

PETER (L.C.). I don't think it's that—she looks much brighter than when I saw her in the passage that night—and her accent sounds quite refined. She must have picked it up from you.

LANCELOT. Nonsense, nonsense ! Bring over that teapot.

PETER (*stretches out hand*). Oh ! It's scalding—no wonder Mary Ann put on gloves !

LANCELOT. Yes, I dare say that was the reason. Take—er—take an antimacassar.

PETER. And scorch it ?

LANCELOT. I'd like to make a bonfire of them all.

PETER (*lifts teapot*). It's all right. My handkerchief will do.

CANARY (*with sudden loud song*). Sweet, sweet !

PETER (*drops teapot*). What's that ?

LANCELOT. Oh, you gomeril ! Only a canary.

PETER. It's all right. Only a little spilt. (*Wipes carpet with handkerchief*.) You should warn a fellow. I never knew you kept pets. (*Rises, the teapot still in his hand*.)

LANCELOT. I don't. It isn't mine.

PETER. Whose is it ?

LANCELOT. Mary Ann's.

PETER. Mary Ann's ? (*Starts letting tea pour out of spout*.)

LANCELOT. That carpet will be ruined. Mary Ann asked to be allowed to keep the bird here—it's sunnier.

PETER (*wiping the new mess, wringing out handkerchief over carpet, to LanceLOT's frenzy*). But doesn't it worry you when you're at work—a rival composer ? (*Beginning to pour tea into a cup*.)

LANCELOT. Not so much as my rivals on the barrel organ—not so much as that charlatan Keeley Lesterre.

PETER. Keeley Lesterre ! (*Pours tea outside cup on cloth, etc.*) At L.C.) Oh, it's too scalding—I'll, I'll have to send you a pound

of our best Belgravian Blend. (*Wipes cloth with handkerchief.*) But don't you find it a bore to feed the little stranger ? I suppose you give it seed, biscuits—(*looking up from the mopping*)—I hope you don't give it butter.

LANCELOT (R.C., roaring). Don't be an ass !

(PETER falls into chair.)

You don't suppose I bother my head whether the thing eats butter or marmalade. (*Goes to table, begins to pour out tea. Bus.*)

PETER (taking him up sharp). Who feeds it then ?

LANCELOT. Mary Ann, I suppose ! Sugar ?

PETER. She hangs about here feeding it ?

LANCELOT. Pitch that dirty rag out of the window ! I believe it eats all day long—gets supplied in the morning like a coal-scuttle. Sugar ? (*Louder than before.*)

PETER (going to and opening window solemnly). Lancelot, (*throws handkerchief out*) Mary Ann's mashed on you. (*Shuts window.*)

LANCELOT. Don't ! I loathe that word. Besides, now I come to think of it, Rosie feeds it also. Sugar ? (*Very loud.*)

PETER (coming down L.C.). Then Rosie is—dead nuts—too.

LANCELOT. Good Heavens ! (*Pitching a number of lumps of sugar into PETER's cup.*) One would think I were Keeley Lesterre himself—the maiden's prayer. (*Pours tea for himself.*)

PETER (eagerly). I wish you were ! I wish to Heaven you'd knock off a popular ballad, and with the profits give us a grand opera.

LANCELOT. Never ! Take your tea.

PETER. Look here—— (*Taking up tea.*) Don't swear now ! Money-making music is just a trick—and I want to show you. (*Produces music from pocket.*)

LANCELOT. Oh, I know the trick—treacle !

PETER. No, treacle's not enough. It must be a particular brand. (*Takes mouthful of tea.*)

LANCELOT. Golden syrup. Phaugh ! The sweet sticky stuff !

PETER (sputtering). Not so damned sweet and sticky as this stuff ! (*Sets down tea disgustedly. Unrolls music slowly and impressively.*) Now, this is the sort of thing I want you to imitate.

LANCELOT (shrieks). Not "Good-night and Good-bye," I hope !

PETER (coolly). Don't hope so loud. It is !

LANCELOT (rising). Then good-bye and good-night ! (*About to tear it up.*)

PETER. Hold on ! That's not your property.

LANCELOT. Imitate that ! I'd rather teach it to Rosie ! Yes, ha ! ha ! ha ! That will be indeed a revenge. I can imagine no worse fate for a song than to be played by Rosie ! (*Places it on rack of piano.*)

PETER. You are teaching Rosie ?

(LANCELOT strikes keys.)

Oh, poor chap !

(Embarassed pause. LANCELOT drinks tea—PETER takes up the MS. LANCELOT has been writing and peruses it.)

How charming ! I say, you must go on with this. (Takes bread-and-butter.)

LANCELOT. Ach Himmel ! I was just in the vein and then that Rosie came and giggled it all away.

PETER (reading on and munching). Delicious !

LANCELOT (gratified). Ah, what does it suggest to you ?

PETER (reading MS. slowly and waving his arm in time comically as he excogitates). The woodland—a rippling river—innocence—a nymph—

LANCELOT. By Jove ! You've got some musical soul after all, Peter. (PETER gives an insulted "Tut.") It is about a maiden, simple and sweet, dreaming amid the bluebells by the stream at sunset.

PETER (eating bread-and-butter comically). And who is this wonderful woodland creature who has inspired you so ?

LANCELOT. Oh—er—just—er—imagination.

PETER. And what shall you call it ?

LANCELOT. Merely "Meadowsweet." (A knock.) Yes ?

MARY ANN. Not any higher, sir !

(Enter MARY ANN bearing a cheap wooden box on her head, followed by BRAHMSOHN, very fat, in fur coat; as he enters he removes very broad-brimmed, low hat and waves it courteously.)

BRAHMSOHN (speaking with strong German accent only partially indicated in the following text). Ach, Mr. Lancelot, pardon that I am a leetle late—my driver did not know ze way.

LANCELOT (extending hand). I'm delighted to see you, Mr. Brahmson.

BRAHMSOHN. Ah, more sarcasm. Wie geht's, Peter ? (Gives his left hand to PETER, who is L. of him). If I had known before that Mr. Lancelot was a friend of yours, I should have made an exception. But how can I see composers ? Zo many geniuses, zo few publishers ! (Sits L. of table.)

LANCELOT. Forgive me if I wrote rudely.

BRAHMSOHN. Ach, everybody writes rudely. If I don't publish, zey call me a fool—

MARY ANN (at door—correcting). Brute ! (All turn.)

BRAHMSOHN. Zo ?

LANCELOT. She is talking to her canary.

CANARY. Sweet ! sweet !

BRAHMSOHN. And if I do publish they call me a cheat. Nicht wahr, Peter ?

PETER (*l.c., confused*). I never—er—I—but what's in that box ?  
BRAHMSMON. Your friend's manuscripts !

PETER. What !

LANCELOT. I never sent you all that.

BRAHMSMON. Yes, indeed, mein friend, leetle by leetle, like ze snowflakes that make ze avalanche. *Colossal!* Your letters of abuse—Na ! zat would need anozer box.

PETER. Poor Mary Ann ! (*Goes to help the box down.*)

MARY ANN (*moving back*). They're not heavy, sir.

PETER. Mary Ann carrying the music of the future—what a symbolic picture !

BRAHMSMON (*rises*). Allow me, my child.

(BRAHMSMON *takes box and tenders it formally to LANCELOT. MARY ANN crosses up back to c., then to fireplace.*)

With zanks !

LANCELOT. Thank you ! (*Stands it down R. of table.*) And may I give you a cup of tea ?

(PETER *goes to and kneels by box. He opens it and searches in the music.*)

BRAHMSMON. You shall first give me my receipt. (*Hands LANCELOT paper to sign.*)

LANCELOT. Certainly. Where is my pen ? Mary Ann, you're always tidying away my pen.

MARY ANN (*with a smile*). Here it is, sir. (*Taking pen from the coal-scuttle.*)

LANCELOT. How did it get there ? (*He writes receipt.*)

BRAHMSMON. But you have not looked to see. I vant no more letters.

LANCELOT. Oh, I dare say it's all right.

PETER (*examining box*). Ah, there's that sonata ! (*He takes it to piano and begins playing it.*)

(LANCELOT *signs silently and hands paper to BRAHMSMON.*)

BRAHMSMON. Zank you. And now ve can talk. (*Sits l. of table.*) Believe me, mein friend, I vould not give you zese back—if there was von single thing I could sell, a set of lancers or a taking song—

LANCELOT. But I sent you songs. (*Rummages in box, throwing some on floor, and drags out MSS.*) Get away, tea-peddler. (*Pushes PETER away from piano and puts a song on rack over the other piece. PETER crosses down R., sits in armchair.*) Listen to this ! No, you needn't listen, run away, Mary Ann ! (*Begins to play.*)

(MARY ANN *exit sorrowfully.*)

BRAHMSMON (*looking over his shoulder*). And I need not listen eizer. Look at your aggompaniments—all accidentals. You'll never get ze young ladies to play that.

LANCELOT (*rises, comes to table*). I don't write for young ladies.  
(*Sits.*)

BRAHMSON. But I bublish for zem. Mein Gott ! Where else are my customers to come from ?

LANCELOT. Do you mean to say that a musician in this God-forsaken country must have no chords but tonics and dominants !

BRAHMSON. He can have zem at home—in ze box ! And zen your melody itself—quite out of ze average young lady's gompass.

PETER (R., *at fire*). Yes, Lancelot. In music Rosie rules the roost.

BRAHMSON (*now standing, picking up song, revealing another underneath*). No, von't do, von't do. Ah, now, zis song (*picking up the under one*) zat I rejoice to see you are studying, "Good-night and Good-bye."

(LANCELOT makes a great sweep with his arm, smashes all the tea things and moves L.)

PETER. Oh, Brahmson, you shouldn't have mentioned that, it's his red rag—

BRAHMSON. Ah, he is jealous of you, what !

PETER. Hush ! Hush ! (*Makes frantic signs to him*.)

BRAHMSON. Let him be jealous. All ze better. Now I tell him ze royalties I haf paid you.

PETER (*desperately*). Shut up ! (*Pulling BRAHMSON's coat*.)

BRAHMSON (*slowly and unctuously*). On zat one song—

LANCELOT. You paid Peter !

PETER. He's joking. (*Looks daggers at BRAHMSON*.)

BRAHMSON. It vas no joke—four thousand pounds. (*Clapping him on the back*.) What, my great little Keeley Lesterre ! (*Turns up c.*)

LANCELOT (L. of table, flaring up as if to tear PETER to pieces). You are Keeley Lesterre ?

PETER (*seizes bread knife and tenders it to LANCELOT*). Cut off my head and be done with it.

LANCELOT. Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

PETER. I don't see where the fun comes in. (*Crosses down R.*)

LANCELOT. You ! You are the romantic, eye-rolling, moustache-waving, white-browed Keeley Lesterre—Oh heavens ! (*Seizes the magazine*.) Look upon this picture and on this. (*Imitating somebody's Hamlet*.)

PETER (*sullenly*). I can't help Brahmson's dodges.

BRAHMSON (*behind table—laughing*). Ze papers come to me for a portrait of Keeley Lesterre, I give zem a portrait to please my young ladies. Peter, he is not suitable for a sentimental gomposer, what ! No great white brow, no curly hair—he ! he ! he !

LANCELOT (*doubled up with laughter, he sits L. of table*). Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

PETER. Haven't you cackled enough ?

BRAHMSON. Now you—Mr. Lancelot—Heaven has made you ze very thing—you haf only to write ze song to match—and zat box proves you have ze talent for anything. To show you I do not flatter, here—(*producing notebook*)—I buy ze song for thirty pounds paid in advance—and the words you haf for nothing. Vere are zey? (*Looks in pocketbook*.) Ah, here. Ze song will be called “Adieu and farevell,” and it goes, “Von kiss, my dear, farevell.”

LANCELOT (*rising*). But that's the same as “Good-night and Good-bye”!

PETER. That's the idea, always stick close to a success.

BRAHMSON. Zere, mein friend. (*Rolls up the three ten-pound notes in the paper of words*.) Ze words and ze money—you give me back ze words and ze music. (*Puts them on table near LANCELOT*.)

LANCELOT (*taking it up and parodying BRAHMSON's manner*). With zanks. (*Places them on table near BRAHMSON*.)

PETER (*down R.*). Don't be an idiot, Lancelot. You must keep the pot boiling.

LANCELOT (*moving to PETER*). Thank you. Keep your teapot wisdom to yourself.

PETER. This is only by-play, old chap. I do music after business. Why shouldn't you do business after music?

BRAHMSON (*adds another ten-pound note*). Zere's another ten. And anozer twenty-five if the sale exceeds ten thousand. And zat's my last word. (*Pushes the notes and paper of words towards LANCELOT—turns up C.*)

LANCELOT (*R.C.*). You have heard mine.

(Enter MARY ANN with a telegram on tray, her hands bare.)

LANCELOT. Ah—the wire from Gasco! (*Rushes over to get it and tears it open frenziedly—his face falls—lets telegram flutter to the ground*.)

PETER (*R.*). From Gas and Co.?

LANCELOT (*L.C., despairing whisper*). Yes—you were right.

MARY ANN (*L., perceives crockery*). Oh dear, everything's smashed up! (*A pause, goes to LANCELOT*.) Is there any answer, sir?

LANCELOT (*walks slowly to the table, takes up notes and puts them in pocket—tragically*). There is my answer!

PETER. Hooray! I could do a waltz. (*Seizes a chair and waltzes*.)

(MARY ANN picks up telegram and hands it to LANCELOT, who drops it on floor.)

“Kiss me, dear love.” Oh! (*Stops waltz abruptly*.) No offence, old fellow. (*Catches sight of MARY ANN looking mystified*.) All right, Mary Ann, no answer.

(MARY ANN crosses him to door.)

Stop ! (*Crosses to l.*) I'm sorry I made you cry before—here's half a crown—get yourself another pair of gloves.

MARY ANN. No, thank you, sir. (*Dignified exit with tray.*)

PETER. The little minx ! (*Turns up l.*)

LANCELOT (*tragically*). She refuses and I accept.

BRAHMSON (R.C.). Von wise, von foolish.

LANCELOT. No ! Let us be fools together—(*Draws out notes.*)

(*Door bursts open, admitting MRS. LEADBATTER and ROSIE.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Hexcoose me, sir, but I can't wait about hall day—O Heavens, my carpet is ruined ! (*Kneels, feeling carpet.*)

ROSIE. And the crockery—O golly ! (*Recovering gentility.*) What a catastrophe !

LANCELOT. Take your money (*gives her one note*) ; take your crockery (*gives another*) ; take your carpet (*gives a third*) ; take a week's notice (*gives her the last*), and take your departure (*gives her the paper of words.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*clutching money, and seizing ROSIE's hand again.*) Come away, Rosie, he's taken again. (*Frightened exit of both, ROSIE giggling hysterically.*)

BRAHMSON (c., laughing). Adieu and farevell with a vengeance. Vat !

PETER (L.C.). Yes, I think we'd better go too. (*To BRAHMSON.*) You'll get your song. (*To LANCELOT.*) Good-bye, old man.

LANCELOT. Good-bye. I'm sorry this vulgar scene should have occurred.

PETER. I'm not. It woke you up. When inclined to dream again, remember Rosie.

BRAHMSON (*goes to LANCELOT and shakes hands.*) And write for her. Auf Wiedersehen.

(*Exeunt PETER and BRAHMSON.*)

LANCELOT. Write for Rosie ! O Heavens, and I thought teaching her was the lowest hell. (*Goes up to window and sits on sill.*)

(*MARY ANN enters with tray containing three notes, gold, silver, coppers, and papers. She puts it on chair, and draws on her gloves.*)

LANCELOT. Dear Mary Ann, she is the one comfort left me.

(*MARY ANN brings the letter-tray.*)

MARY ANN (c.). Your receipt and your change, sir, and missus says she's only charged you half a suvrin for the crockery and the carpet, but it's sovereign, not suvrin, isn't it, sir ?

LANCELOT (R.C.). I don't care whether she's charged suvrins or sovereigns. Three notes back and lots of gold, and silver and coppers. I'm quite rich. Ah, that must be the receipt—(*takes up the paper*)

*of words, reads in surprise*) "Adieu and farewell." Ha ! ha ! Did I give her that too ?

MARY ANN (*brightly*). Yessir.

LANCELOT (*laughs*). How funny, for I did give notice. (*Moves to armchair R.*)

MARY ANN (*tragically*). You're going ?

LANCELOT. Yes, thank God. (*Sits.*)

MARY ANN. Oh, please sir, then I must go too. (*Now behind the table.*)

LANCELOT. You ? Where ?

MARY ANN. Wherever you lodge, sir. I can get work at the same place.

LANCELOT (*rises*). But, my child, I'm going to the country. (*He goes to her.*)

MARY ANN (*R.C.*). Oh, please sir, I should like that better.

LANCELOT. You simple little thing ! (*Takes her face in his hands—then puts her from him and walks about it in agitation. Stops at canary.*) O Dick, Dick, was ever a man so tempted ?

CANARY. Sweet, sweet ! (*Carols with varying cadence.*)

MARY ANN. Please, sir, if you lived in a farm, I could help the farmer's missus, and drive the milk-cart.

(*The bird still sings.*)

LANCELOT (*to the canary*). You are right, Dick, it would be a charity to rescue her from this drudgery. (*Aloud.*) Well, perhaps—(*Coming down c.*)

MARY ANN (*joyfully*). Oh, I'll tell the missus. (*Starts towards door.*)

LANCELOT. Hush ! Nobody must ever know. (*Detaining her.*)

MARY ANN. Not missus—?

LANCELOT. No, no. It must be a secret between us—like the gloves. Do you understand ? (*He moves towards the fire and then speaks half to himself.*) We've both slaved and suffered without reward—we need a little sunshine, a little of the joy of life. (*Returning towards MARY ANN.*) Yes, you shall come with me.

MARY ANN. Oh, Mr. Lancelot ! (*Runs to him hysterically.*)

LANCELOT. My little good fairy shall flap her wings and fly away with me to the green country, and we shall be alone in a little cottage —you and I—

MARY ANN (*with innocent surprise*). By ourselves !

LANCELOT. Yes, you shall be my little housekeeper—and in the evening at sunset you shall fold your wings, and stand by the river and dream.

(*The canary sings louder.*)

MARY ANN. Oh, Mr. Lancelot ! And we will take the canary too !

LANCELOT. Yes, dear !

MARY ANN. Just we three !

LANCELOT. Just we three—and the music box.

MARY ANN (*slowly—wistfully*). And the music. (*Nestles to him*.)

(*The canary stops.*)

LANCELOT (*with passion and solemnity*). And then—then it will not be good-bye nor good-night. Do you understand ?

MARY ANN. Yes, sir ! (*Nestles closer to him*.)

LANCELOT. But think, think, Mary Ann ! (*Gently puts her away*.) Do you understand ?

MARY ANN. Yes, sir, I understand—(*coming to him again*.) I shall be with you always.

LANCELOT.—Well !—I shall look after you always.

MARY ANN. Yes, yes, always ! (*Nestles to him again*.)

LANCELOT. Oh, you little white Topsy ! I don't believe you know how you came into the world. I dare say you " 'specs you growed."

MARY ANN. No, sir, God made me.

(*He puts her away again—and stands looking at her, conscience-stricken.*)

CURTAIN.

## ACT III

*The same SCENE—a week later. It is evening. The gas is lit. MSS. all neatly cleared away. A syphon and whisky on the table.*

MARY ANN is discovered on her knees, cording the music box, while LANCELOT with his back to the fire is smoking a pipe.

MARY ANN (*down R. tying on the label, a little hampered by her gloves*). There, sir. The music is ready to go.

LANCELOT (*gaily*). Ready to accompany us, eh? And we've lots of it to finish in the cottage, haven't we, child?

MARY ANN. Oh, Mr. Lancelot!

CANARY. Sweet, sweet, etc.

MARY ANN (*crosses up C.*) Oh, please, sir, how am I to steal the canary out?

LANCELOT. Dick had better go with my luggage in the morning. Make me a present of him, then you'll have nothing to hamper you when you follow me on Thursday.

MARY ANN. Thursday will be such a long time.

LANCELOT. Why, scarcely long enough to evade suspicion. Only two days after me, little silly! You don't want missus to come and drag you back, do you? (*Sits in armchair.*)

MARY ANN (*shudders*). No, sir. Then I'll put one of your labels on it. (*Ties a label while canary sings. The bell rings outside, mingling with the singing.*) Oh, please, sir, I must go. (*Crosses to L.*)

LANCELOT. All right, child, run away!

MARY ANN (*at door, drawing off her gloves, returns*). Oh, Mr. Lancelot!

LANCELOT. Well? (*Rises and moves to table. The bell goes again.*)

MARY ANN. I feel as if she is dragging me away from you.

LANCELOT (*kindly*). Nonsense, nonsense! (*Touches her hair.*)

MARY ANN. Oh, Mr. Lancelot, I'm all of a shiver!

LANCELOT. I don't wonder—with that miserable thin dress. (*Touching it.*) But you won't wear that much longer, thank goodness.

MARY ANN. Thank you, sir, and—(*ecstatically*)—Spring is coming, too. (*The bell clangs. Her face changes. She shivers violently.*)

Oh, Mr. Lancelot, it sounds so angry. (*Runs to him as if for protection.*) If she should have found out!

LANCELOT. Nonsense! Unless you've been silly.

MARY ANN. No, sir, but please, sir, I don't want to go down. I feel as if I shall never see you again.

LANCELOT. Crybaby! I'm not going till the morning. Why, even to-morrow—(*smiling*)—you'll bring me my breakfast.

MARY ANN. Yes, sir, and—(*ecstatically*)—I'll do your boots!

LANCELOT. Ah, that reminds me—you might brush my clothes—I'm going out to-night with Peter.

MARY ANN. Thank you, sir. (*Runs behind screen.*)

LANCELOT. Dear little Mary Ann! It will be nice to rescue her from this drudgery. (*Stops and examines the music box.*) How neatly she's corded it. She will be very useful. (*Moves to fireplace. There is a knock.*) Come in!

(ROSIE enters.)

ROSIE. Is Mary Ann here?

LANCELOT. Yes, she is getting out my clothes.

ROSIE (*going towards screen*). Mary Ann!

(MARY ANN appears from behind screen.)

You must come at once—most particular.

MARY ANN (*advancing, carrying dress clothes in bare hands*). Yes, miss.

(*Exeunt ROSIE and MARY ANN; the latter, holding the clothes, looks back at LANCELOT with the same pitiful sense of being dragged away.*)

LANCELOT (*moving to canary*). Well, Dick, so you are going back to the country!

CANARY. Sweet, sweet, etc.

LANCELOT. Yes. I'd be as happy as you if only I had Brahms' wretched song off my mind. (*Pulls paper of words out of pocket—reads.*) "Adieu and farewell!" (*Puts it on piano rack, sits down and runs his hands over the keys, muttering.*) What a blessing to be done with it and Mrs. Leadbatter together! (*Sings.*)

"One kiss, my dear, farewell!"

Oh, if I could only get Peter's treacle out of my head! (*Tries a bar or two. It still comes rather like "Good-night and Good-bye."*)

PETER (*outside*). May I come in?

LANCELOT. Talk of the treacle—

(*He gets up. PETER enters. He wears an overcoat over his evening dress.*)

PETER (L.C.). Nobody seems to be about—and the hall door was wide open—what's up?

LANCELOT (c.). Nothing that I'm aware of. What brings you? Our dinner off?

PETER. No fear! I've just dropped in on my way to our Belgravian branch, to remind you. Lady Chelmer has summoned me suddenly.

LANCELOT. Lady Chelmer?

PETER. Oh, did I never tell you of the society personage who recommends our tea to the peerage?

LANCELOT. Awful!

PETER. Awful? It's lovely tea. Ask your brother! Well, good-bye. My cab's waiting. Glad you hadn't forgotten!

LANCELOT. Forgotten! Instead of eternally tossing up—chops or steaks—I'm quite looking forward to a civilized meal.

PETER. That's jolly—because I've got some pretty women to meet you—

LANCELOT (*vexed—rises*). Oh, shan't we be alone? Why didn't you say so? (*Sarcastic*.) Are they tea dealers or adorers of treacle?

PETER. Shut up! All crazy to meet *you*.

LANCELOT (r.c.). Me? You must have been gassing!

PETER. Well, why shouldn't I be proud to be a pal of the coming genius?

LANCELOT. Coming! (*Points to paper on piano*.) "Adieu and farewell." The *going* genius.

PETER. Of course it'll go. But that's just tuning up. Wait! Miss Brooke—Miss Brooke (*impressively*)—was saying (*imitating her mincing accents*), "How ripping it would be to bring out an opera of your friend's at Covent Garden!"—she's the daughter of Brooke, the Copper King, you know.

LANCELOT. What! You villain! (*Advances threateningly*.) Is it matrimonial designs upon me you've got now?

PETER. Don't rumple my jewelled shirt! You shall sit next to Lady Lucy, who hasn't a penny. May I have a whisky-and-soda?

LANCELOT. Help yourself! (*PETER does so from the syphon and whisky on the table*.) I wonder, Peter, *you've* not married, surrounded by all these adorers. (*Crosses to piano*.)

PETER. All what adorers? Nobody knows I'm Keeley Lesterre.

LANCELOT. Then I shall tell Lady Lucy.

PETER (*nearly choking as he drinks*). For Heaven's sake! That would do for me altogether. So long as the dear creatures don't see me they can go on adoring me. Now with you— (*Drinks*.)

LANCELOT. So long as they don't hear me— (*Sits at piano*.)

PETER. Rubbish! Everybody hasn't got donkey's ears. (*Looks at piano*.) Ah, Brahms' imitation egg. I'm glad you're hatching that! Shan't interrupt you. Au revoir! (*Hastens to door*.)

LANCELOT. Auf Wiedersehen! (*Still sitting at piano and playing*.)

PETER (*looking around with hand on door handle*). Don't have an

attack of inspiration and forgot to dress—you've only half an hour.  
(*Looking at watch.*)

LANCELOT (*playing softly*). Don't worry ! (*Feeling for the desired tune of "Adieu and farewell."*) Mary Ann is brushing my togs now. It will be nice to talk to a woman of one's world again.

PETER. I'd better pick you up, all the same, on my way back.  
(*Opens door.*)

LANCELOT. As you will.

MRS. LEADBATTER'S voice (*in loud tones as from the parlour below.*) Not another stroke of work do you do in my 'ouse, Mary Ann.

LANCELOT (*springing up*). What's that ?

PETER. Only poor Mary Ann getting into a row.

(*Sounds of MARY ANN's sobs.*)

LANCELOT. Is that she crying ?

PETER (*half outside*). I'm afraid so. (*Sobs outside.*) Poor little thing. And she won't take my half-crowns. Well, I must fly—my Belgravian branch will be closing.

(*Exit and bangs door.*)

LANCELOT. What has happened ? (*Paces up and down—MARY ANN's sobs are faintly heard. After awhile he opens the door and listens.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*from outside—now nearer as from the passage.*) Not a word about 'im all this time. Oh, the sly little baggage ! Who could never 'ave believed it ?

(*LANCELOT closes door, terror-stricken.*)

LANCELOT. The little silly has gone and given it all away. What the devil am I to say ? (*Paces again.*) I'd better face the music.  
(*Opens door and calls down.*) Is that you, Mrs. Leadbatter ? What's all this noise about ? I can't work.

MRS. LEADBATTER (*speaking up the stairs*). And who *can* work, I should like to know, with such goings on ? I'm glad there's the clergyman 'ere to tell 'er what's right.

LANCELOT (*staggering back*). The clergyman ?

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*oily voice from below*). I'm sorry, sir, to have interfered with your work, but—

MRS. LEADBATTER (*outside—below*). Yes, you go hup sir, and tell him the rights and wrongs of it.

LANCELOT. O Lord ! (*Paces to and fro.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*near door*). May I come in ?

LANCELOT. De-de-lighted.

(*Enter REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE, closely followed by MRS. LEADBATTER.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. The Rev. Samuel Smedge, at your service.

LANCELOT. I want no services. Be seated, pray—I mean please.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Thank you. (*Looks around, selects the chair l. of table and sinks voluptuously into it.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. The 'oly gentleman is the vicar from Mary Ann's village.

LANCELOT. Ah, the kangaroo! Er—a nasty cold day. (*Pokes the fire with shovel.*) Er—will you have a drink, Mr. Smudge? I mean Smedge.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. You're very kind. A glass of water.

LANCELOT (*looks around*). I—I'm afraid there's only soda-water.

(*LANCELOT rings bell.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*crosses to R.C.*). Oh, no, sir, you mustn't, sir. Mary Ann's hoff.

LANCELOT. Off? (*Drops shovel.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Hoff duty for ever.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Never mind—soda-water will do.

MRS. LEADBATTER. The sly little minx—do you think I can keep such a gal in my kitchen?

LANCELOT (*alarmed*). Such a girl? (*Takes up whisky bottle absent-mindedly.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. A gal as is goin' to 'ave 'er own norse and kerridge.

LANCELOT. Norse and kerridge? (*Puzzled—pours whisky absent-mindedly into the vicar's glass.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Our worthy friend means horse and carriage.

LANCELOT. Yes, but what does horse and carriage mean? (*Puts glass to syphon.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. I may be a hignorant woman, but I do know 'arf a million is enough for a norse and kerridge.

LANCELOT (*squirting soda over table*). Half a million?

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Such in round figures in pounds sterling is the fortune our dear Mary Ann has come into.

LANCELOT. Mary Ann has come into a fortune? (*Dazedly hands glass to vicar.*) I hope that's not too weak for you.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*taking it with apparent abstraction*). Thank you. Yes, the dear child—(*drinks*)—has become a great heiress. (*Drinks to dregs and with glass still to mouth says*) It is a deep happiness—(*puts down glass*)—to all of us who have watched over her.

MRS. LEADBATTER (*hysterically*). I'm sure 'er own mother couldn't 'ave watched over 'er more, 'and and foot, the happle of my heye—heddicated 'er out of 'er country talk and kep' 'er out o' loose company, as you yourself, sir—(*to LANCELOT*)—can bear witness. (*Sits on musicbox.*)

LANCELOT. But where? How? Who?

MRS. LEADBATTER. 'Ow? 'Oo? 'E!

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*solemnly*). Her brother, Tom.

MRS. LEADBATTER. And never said a word about 'im, the sly little minx !

LANCELOT (*still dazed*). The wicked brother Tom ?

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*holding up hands of deprecation*). He is gone beyond our earthly judgment. He disturbed my sermons grievously by wilful coughing, but I forgive him freely. Our dearly beloved sister—(*waving hand*)—will make a better use of his half-million—under Providence— (*His hand descends rhetorically on his own heart as with suggestion Providence is he.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Amen !

LANCELOT. But where did he get all his money ?

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Petroleum wells. I believe the technical expression is "he struck ile." I only heard from the American lawyers on Saturday night, and I tarried but to preach on Sunday, despite the anxiety of my flock that I should at once hasten to London. You see, all who knew her hunger grievously for their dear Mary Ann.

(*A knock. Enter ROSIE with dress clothes and awed demeanour.*)

ROSIE. You rang, sir ? Miss Mary Ann is engaged. And I've brought your clothes.

LANCELOT. Thank you.

(*She puts them behind screen.*)

(*LANCELOT sits on table, swinging his legs nervously.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. And bring the 'oly gentleman some water, Rosie.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Pray, pray do not trouble. I find soda-water a most satisfactory substitute.

MRS. LEADBATTER (*to ROSIE, as she emerges from screen*). Is Miss Mary Ann left hoff yowling ?

ROSIE. No, Ma !

MRS. LEADBATTER. Go and give 'er a cup of tea with a little sperrits in it.

(*ROSIE exits solemnly—never more to giggle.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Spirits !

MRS. LEADBATTER (*reassuringly*). Oh, I've always trained her up for duty, your 'oliness, and now hit'shall wasted. (*Wrings her hands and collapses on music-box.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*consolingly*). No, no, good work is never wasted.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Not wasted, your 'oliness ? Ain't you taking 'er where there's no boots to black and no beds to make ? Didn't I 'ave to drag the clothes brush from 'er 'and and tell 'er that she was a laidy ? (*To LANCELOT.*) "'Ere's a suvrin, Mary Ann," says I, "go and buy yourself a decent dress and jacket. You can't go

with that good kind gentleman in the dirty print. And get a pair of gloves," says I. No sooner was the gloves out of my mouth than she busts like a water-pipe—

LANCELOT (*apprehensively—hurriedly*). Ah, her brother's death, no doubt.

MRS. LEADBATTER. My Rosie never had nobody to die and leave her money, poor dear child, hexcept me, please Gawd. (*Weeps.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Do not weep. You have done your duty by our dear Mary Ann, since I entrusted her to your loving care. What a comfort, sir, to see such goodness in lowly places.

LANCELOT (*looking down on MRS. LEADBATTER on the music-box—gruntingly*). Yes, yes.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Particularly when there is so much wickedness seated on high.

LANCELOT (*slipping down uneasily from table*). Yes, yes. (*With outstretched hands of farewell, walks to vicar, who shows no signs of going.*) Must you go? I'm so glad—I mean I'm so sorry! But I'm glad about Mary Ann.

(MRS. LEADBATTER *rises and crosses to L.C. behind table.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. The whole countryside is glad. In fact her return on Thursday afternoon will almost assume the dimensions of a fête.

LANCELOT (*crosses to c.*). You are not taking her till Thursday afternoon?

MRS. LEADBATTER. She couldn't go in that dirty print. (*Crosses to door L.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. In my foolish masculine way I did not think of clothes. Mrs. Smedge will be grievously disappointed at my return without the dear child. But I must journey up again to this roaring Metropolis, to and fro—to and fro—like a weaver's shuttle.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Oh, you can have Mr. Lancelot's bed to-morrow, and for to-night, your 'oliness—

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*waving hand*). No—duty is duty. Good-bye till Thursday afternoon.

(MRS. LEADBATTER *opens door for him.*)

Thank you so much for the soda-water.

(*Exeunt REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE and MRS. LEADBATTER.*)

LANCELOT (*wiping his forehead*). Phew! (*Whistles.*)

CANARY (*reply to whistle*). Two, two. (*Gradually launches into jubilant melody.*)

(*LANCELOT walks to screen, but turns as if forgetting his intentions, strides silently, as in tumultuous thought, three times across the room, and at last turns upon the rapturous canary.*)

LANCELOT (*savagely*). Oh, you think you're going to have a golden cage, do you ? (*Canary stops.*) Blind fate, showering her gifts on babes and sucklings ! (*Stops awestruck with sudden thought, in lower tones, sinking gradually to a whisper.*) Blind fate ? Or is there a seeing Providence ? Was Mary Ann right ? And God made her ? And watches over her ? Was she right ? (*Sinks broodingly into armchair. Buries head in hands.*)

(*A timid knock. No answer.*)

(Enter MARY ANN carrying a tray with knife and fork, glass, plates, etc., which she places on chair left of table, while she slowly drags on her gloves. Her eyes are ringed with tears and she is shaken with suppressed sobs. She clears table, extracts white cloth from sideboard and lays it, every now and then stealing a pathetic glance at the immobile LANCELOT. At last an uncontrollably loud sob bursts from her.)

LANCELOT (*jumps to his feet*). Mary Ann !

MARY ANN (*choking down sob*). Yessir.

LANCELOT (*rubbing eyes at sight of laid table and MARY ANN, as if he might have been dreaming*). Is it true—is it true—you have come into half a million ?

MARY ANN. Yessir—and will you have steak or chops ?

LANCELOT (*mechanically taking out coin and tossing it*). Heads steak, tails chops ! (*Examines coin.*) Chops ! (*Glumly.*) I've lost. I always lose ! (*Suddenly recalling facts.*) Oh, but you mustn't ! You mustn't wait on me any more—

MARY ANN. I shall always wait on you, Mr. Lancelot.

LANCELOT (*R.C.*). But your vicar is taking you away on Thursday afternoon.

MARY ANN (*great burst of joy*). Not till Thursday afternoon ? Then that will be easy, I shall be gone.

LANCELOT. Gone ? Where ?

MARY ANN. With you, sir. And will you have tomatoes or potatoes ? (*Turns away and rummages in sideboard, kneeling.*)

LANCELOT (*petulantly*). Mary Ann !

MARY ANN (*looking up servant-like*). Yessir !

LANCELOT. Are you foolish ?

MARY ANN (*tearfully*). No, Mr. Lancelot.

LANCELOT. But you talk as if you were. You mustn't run away from the vicar just when he's going to get you your money. (*Sits on table.*)

MARY ANN (*rising—with cruet-stand*). But I don't want to go with the vicar. (*Moving towards him.*) You said you would take me.

LANCELOT (*retreating*). Yes—yes—but don't you understand that—that I can wait ?

MARY ANN. Can't the vicar wait ?

LANCELOT. Listen to me, Mary Ann. (*She places cruet sullenly on table.*)

MARY ANN. Yessir.

LANCELOT. You're a young woman, not a baby. Just strive to grasp what I'm going to tell you.

MARY ANN. Yessir. (*Fumbles impatiently at gloves.*)

LANCELOT. You are now the owner of half a million—five hundred thousand pounds. Think of ten sovereigns, ten golden sovereigns like the one Mrs. Leadbatter gave you, then—(*stretches arms perpendicularly*)—ten times as much as that; then—(*heightens arms further*)—ten times as much as that, then—(*arms at widest*)—ten times as much as that, then—(*further widening being impossible, sweeps arms round the horizon*)—fifty times as much as all that. Do you understand how rich you are?

MARY ANN. Yessir, and will you have tomatoes or potatoes? Please, sir, tell me quick. Miss Rosie is outside and she might stop my going with you.

LANCELOT. But don't you see I can't—now?

MARY ANN (*moving L.*). Then I'll make it tomatoes, they go best with chops.

LANCELOT (*groaning*). She's hopeless. (*Turns away. A knock.*) Yes?

(Enter ROSIE, not closing door. She moves and talks in same grave awe.)

ROSIE. Ma instructs me to say, will you please not let Miss Mary Ann do anything menial.

LANCELOT (*R.C., grumpily*). Miss Mary Ann must please herself. Good-bye both of you, I've got to dress. (*Hastens behind screen.*) Oh, what an ass I am! (*Pops head around screen.*) I say, I don't want chops, I'm going out. (*Disappears.*)

ROSIE (*takes tray from chair*). Please go down, Miss Mary Ann, I'll clear.

MARY ANN. No.

(MARY ANN makes for tray and seizes it. ROSIE endeavours to wrest it from her. Tug-of-war in grim silence, the latent jealousy of the two girls adding to its earnestness. The superior strength of ROSIE drags MARY ANN towards the open door. MRS. LEADBATTER appears on threshold. Holds up hands in horror.)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Take off that cap, Miss Mary Ann.

(Grabs for cap. MARY ANN puts up her hand and ROSIE staggers back with the tray. MRS. LEADBATTER hastens towards table to clear it. MARY ANN left in miserable defeat.)

LANCELOT. You there, Mrs. Leadbatter? (*Throws muddy dress shoes around screen.*) Quick, please!

(MARY ANN makes a desperate rush past MRS. LEADBATTER, who has plates, etc., in her hands, grabs shoes and disappears.)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*paralysed*). The most obstinate, ungrateful millionairess I never 'ad in the 'ouse.

ROSIE (*solemnly*). Oh, Ma ! (*Takes plates from MRS. LEADBATTER and puts them on tray.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Well, so she is. Worse than Betsy Jemima. Keeps on 'er cap hout of spite—just to make the neighbours think I've halways hill-treated 'er and kep' 'er down. And I begged 'er to go and sit in the drorin'-room and fold 'er arms like a real lady.

LANCELOT. Don't worry me. You make me crazy to-day. I've forgotten to wash.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Just like that Jemima ! She never washed. (*Helps with clearing.*) Rosy cheeks like a happen, but a worm hind-side—the way that 'ussy turned on me—

LANCELOT (*sputtering in water*). It was the worm that turned.

MRS. LEADBATTER. A worm ! A wiper ! A dirty wiper !

LANCELOT (*behind screen*). Yes, you might have given me a clean towel.

MRS. LEADBATTER. A clean towel !—when you're going to-morrow !

(*Exit ROSIE with laden tray. MRS. LEADBATTER folds cloth.*)

LANCELOT (*behind screen*). I'm going to-night—I shall sleep at a friend's—I'll write you where to send my things.

MRS. LEADBATTER. A nice bother—packing up your hoddls and hends—(*puts cloth in sideboard*)—before my new general comes in.

(*Grumbling exit.*)

LANCELOT. A general taking this room ? What's happened to your lodgings ? Swarming with heiresses and generals. But why don't they bring up my shoes ?

(*Emerges nearly dressed. Rings bell by fireplace—after a brief interval occupied in dressing, enter MARY ANN.*)

MARY ANN. Please, sir—(*smiling*)—I dodged them both. (*Begins putting on gloves.*)

LANCELOT. Oh, hang your gloves, I want my shoes.

MARY ANN. I've only done one, sir.

LANCELOT. Well, be quick with the other—no—I mean—don't finish the other at all—no, I mean—er—oh, Donner und Blitzen ! (*Ruffles his hair.*)

MARY ANN. You'd better have your pen, sir.

LANCELOT. Oh, no, never again !

MARY ANN. Don't be roary, sir. Who's to do your boots in the cottage if not me ?

LANCELOT. Mary Ann ! (*Crosses to L.C.*)

MARY ANN. Yes, Mr. Lancelot.

LANCELOT. You're not going to a cottage, but to a fine manor house—like the squire's—

MARY ANN. Oh, are we, sir ?

LANCELOT (*vexed*). I'm talking of *your* manor-house—beautiful furniture, carpets, pictures—all bought with *your* money—do you understand ?

MARY ANN. Please, sir, then couldn't the money run to a large farm instead, with lots of cows and pigs ?

LANCELOT (*groans*). You can have fifty farms and legions of pigs.

MARY ANN (*in joyous wonder*). O-h-h ! (*Weeping*.) Oh-h-h ! (*Wipes eyes with apron*.)

LANCELOT (R.C.). What's up now ?

MARY ANN. Feyther—I mean father would have been so happy. Meat every day and pudden on Sunday. (*With joyous transition*.) And could I have a piano ?

LANCELOT. Yes, pigs, puddings, pianos, kangaroos even. All that the heart of maiden can desire. (*Moves up behind armchair R.*)

MARY ANN. And will you learn me to play ?

LANCELOT. Ahem !—that's a little more difficult.

MARY ANN. I'll try so hard, sir.

LANCELOT. But—(*smiling forcedly*)—I may not be at the farm.

MARY ANN (*feverishly*). Oh, but you will. You will take me there instead of to the cottage.

LANCELOT (*moves to R.C.—with feigned playfulness*). No, I should be out of place among all those pigs.

MARY ANN. Oh, no, sir, you wouldn't—

LANCELOT. Thank you. But I can't go to your farm.

MARY ANN. Then I'll come to your cottage.

LANCELOT. What ! And leave all those pigs !

MARY ANN. Please, sir, you're the only one I want.

LANCELOT. Thank you, again, but don't you see that everything is altered ?

MARY ANN. What's altered ? You are here, and here be I.

LANCELOT. Ah, but it's a different *you*, now. (*Turns away*.)

MARY ANN. No, Mr. Lancelot. (*Seizes his hand*.)

LANCELOT. Yes, it is. You are somebody now. Before, no one cared or bothered about you—you were no more than a dead leaf whirling in the street.

MARY ANN (*clinging to him*). Yes, *you* cared—you bothered about me.

LANCELOT. Yes, yes, but now the world's eyes are on you—people will talk if you go away with me.

MARY ANN. Why will they talk ? What harm shall I do them ?

LANCELOT. It's yourself you will harm.

MARY ANN. No, sir, I shall be happy.

LANCELOT (*confused*). Yes, but—er—one day you will want—to marry.

MARY ANN. No, Mr. Lancelot, I don't want to marry. I don't ever want to go away from you.

LANCELOT (*coughing uneasily*). I see you understand I'm not going to marry you.

MARY ANN. Yes, sir.

LANCELOT. And that I never intended to marry you ?

MARY ANN. Yes, sir.

LANCELOT. But don't you see how—Oh ! I'm a brute !

MARY ANN. Oh, no, sir, you're not a music publisher.

LANCELOT. Worse.

MARY ANN. Oh, no, sir. You have made me so happy.

LANCELOT. Then remain so. To take you with me would be wicked.

MARY ANN. But you didn't mind being wicked before ? (*Getting anxious.*)

LANCELOT. I'm not sure I mind now. (*Crosses to her, takes her hand.*) It's for your sake, Mary Ann. Be sensible and go back quietly on Thursday with the vicar.

MARY ANN (*tearfully*). But then I shan't know how to come to you.

LANCELOT (*drops her hand*). Absolutely hopeless. You *mustn't* come with me. Everybody will talk of you as they did of Tom.

MARY ANN (*sobbing*). I don't care. I was a dead leaf so long. Nobody ever bothered to call me wicked then. (*Sits sobbing L. of table.*)

LANCELOT. Hush ! Hush ! (*Goes to door L. and closes it more tightly.*) Understand once for all. Even if you were simple enough to go with me, I couldn't be rogue enough to take you. It would be doing you a terrible wrong.

MARY ANN. Why more so than before ?

LANCELOT (*wincing*). You had better go downstairs—Mrs. Leadbatter will wonder—

MARY ANN (*frenziedly, comprehension of parting at last dawning*). You are going away without me ! (*Clings to him.*)

LANCELOT. Hush ! Hush !

MARY ANN (*shriekingly*). You are going away without me—I shall never see you again !

LANCELOT. Be sensible, Mary Ann. You are going to have a very happy life, all silks and satins—

MARY ANN. You won't take me with you !

LANCELOT (*losing his temper*). Don't you understand that that's impossible—unless—(*contemptuously*)—unless I marry you.

MARY ANN (*ceasing to sob—breathes plaintively*). Can't you marry me then ?

LANCELOT. You know it's impossible.

MARY ANN. Why is it impossible ?

LANCELOT. Oh, because—(*slowly*)—because—oh, it's impossible !

MARY ANN (L.C.). Why is it impossible ? I should wait on you just the same,

PETER (*in a loud cheery voice outside as he knocks at the door*). Can I come in ?

(MARY ANN *frenziedly tears off her gloves, which she has gradually pulled on*.)

LANCELOT. Delighted, old chap. (*Moves to fireplace*.)

(Enter PETER.)

(*In a loud voice*.) And you'll bring up my shoes, Mary Ann.

MARY ANN (*chokingly*). Yessir.

(*Flits past PETER and exit*.)

PETER (*goes to piano, picks up a piece of LANCELOT's music*). Well, are you ready ?

LANCELOT. Only got to get into my shoes.

PETER (*as he studies the music*). Your shoes ? How I wish Keeley Lesterre was in them !

LANCELOT. Do you ? I feel like cutting my throat.

PETER (*still studying music*). Ah, these blues are the penalty of genius. But I'd pay it gladly to speak like this to the souls of men. (*Drops deliberately into chair L. of table*.) I'm only a merchant ; tea by day and tunes by night, and the tunes are only fit to be given away with a pound of the tea. Ah—(*tragically*)—when I think of the sacred fervour with which I set out for Leipsic ; the music throbbing at my heart—(*drops head disconsolately on hands*) the divine ambition— (*With sudden shriek as his fingers become aware of his face*.) I'm not shaved ! (*Jumps up*.)

LANCELOT (*laughing*). You can use my razor, old man.

PETER. Your razor, no thank you, I remember Leipsic. (*Goes to door*.) I'll find a barber's pole in a moment. Ah, here come your shoes.

(Enter ROSIE through open door with shoes.)

Shan't be five minutes.

(Exit.)

ROSIE. Miss Mary Ann requested me to bring you these.

(*Puts shoes near armchair. Solemn exit*.)

LANCELOT. Poor little Mary Ann ! (*The canary sings*.) Oh, Dick, Dick, what a foolish, adorable little mistress you've got ! (*Quoting tenderly*.) She would wait on me just the same ! But it is impossible, isn't it Dick ?

CANARY. Sweet, sweet !

LANCELOT. Ah, you don't think it so impossible. But you don't know the world, Dick, any more than your mistress. (*Kicks against music-box*.) And yet I might starve for all the world cares. And my songs might lie unknown for ever, rotting in this coffin.

(Spurns music-box with foot.) Have I the right to refuse them life, and wings and immortality? Have I the right to withhold happiness from Mary Ann? (Falls into armchair and broods. Perceives shoes, and begins to kick off his slippers. Tries to put on shoe, it won't go.) Wrong foot! (Tries the other—it won't go.) What the deuce! (Inserts his hand.) Something stuck in it—no wonder! (Begins to pull it out, produces glove.) A glove? (Explores other foot and produces the fellow. Examines them, puzzled for a moment, then understands.) Ah! Mary Ann's! She has sent me back my gloves. (Half hysterically.) How funny!

(Puts shoes on. As he is finishing door opens, and enter MARY ANN. He jumps up. She tries to retreat.)

MARY ANN. Please sir, I'm sorry—I thought you were gone with Mr. Peter. I heard the cab—so I came for my canary.

LANCELOT. Oho! You gave that to me!

MARY ANN (joyously). Would you really like it?

LANCELOT. I should love to have it.

MARY ANN. Then— (Her face falls.) No, I know it's not right.

LANCELOT (puzzled). Not right?

MARY ANN. If people part they have to give back the presents. I remember that from our village.

LANCELOT (touched—smiling). Then I'll buy the canary.

MARY ANN. Oh, I couldn't sell Dick! (Goes up and brings cage to table c.)

LANCELOT. Not for these gloves? (Produces and dangles them.)

MARY ANN (l.c.). Oh, do you think it wouldn't be wrong, Mr. Lancelot? I don't want to be wicked. You see as I was doin' your shoes, I was thinking of mother and Sally and our black pig, and the way the organ played in church, and all at once somehow I knew it was wicked to bother you any more instead of going to the vicar. And so I put the gloves back in your boots. You didn't think I don't want them, did you, sir? (Kisses them fervidly.) And I do understand why it's impossible for you to marry me—I'm not good enough for you, sir.

LANCELOT (bowing his head). No, Mary Ann, I'm not good enough for you. That's the truth, the bare truth—without gloves.

MARY ANN. I don't understand you, sir.

LANCELOT. Heaven forbid you should! We artists only really care for our art. If I were to marry you it would only be for your half-million. (Crosses down R.) I'm a pauper. And you may be the only person who will ever have heard my music.

MARY ANN. Oh, Mr. Lancelot, I'm so sorry. (Crosses to him.)

LANCELOT. I didn't mean to get your pity. I'm a man, and I dare say I shall pull through. But even at the best, before I get half a million sovereigns out of this box—(Spurns music-box with his foot.) Ah well! I'm not blaming you—it's a funny world.

So beware of men like me—poor and selfish. And when you do marry—

MARY ANN (R.C., bursting into tears at last). Oh, Mr. Lancelot ! But I know I shall never marry anybody else.

LANCELOT. Hush ! Hush ! I thought you were going to be a good girl and not cry again. Dry your eyes now, will you ?

MARY ANN (choking down tears). Yessir. (Lifts apron.)

LANCELOT. Here, take my handkerchief.

MARY ANN (still sobbing). Yessir. (Wipes her eyes.) But I won't marry anybody else.

LANCELOT. Ah, wait till they've taught you arts and graces and dressed you up in silks and fluffery—fortunately everything will help you to forget this nightmare of Mrs. Leadbatter's lodgings. Promise me you will try to forget.

MARY ANN. Yessir—if you will do me a favour.

LANCELOT. Certainly, my child, if I can. (Takes her hand.)

MARY ANN. You have the money, Mr. Lancelot, instead of me.

LANCELOT (turning away.) Now, now, Mary Ann, after talking so sensibly. Ask any other favour, not that.

MARY ANN. Then please, sir, would you—(hesitates)—play me "Good-night and Good-bye" ?

(LANCELOT kisses her hand. He plays the chorus softly and tenderly.

MARY ANN in tears. PETER enters softly.)

PETER. Bravo ! Bravo ! Best compliment you ever paid me in my life, Lancelot. And Mary Ann in tears. (Going to her.) Thank you too, Mary Ann. You can't refuse my half-crown now. (Offers it.)

MARY ANN (very subdued). Thank you very much, sir. (Pockets it.)

LANCELOT. Ha, ha, ha !

PETER (puzzled). What's the joke now ? Oh, this white on my coat. (Takes off overcoat.) Brush this white off, Mary Ann, sharp !

(MARY ANN takes it silently and goes behind screen.)

(To LANCELOT.) Well, now you've been studying my song, I suppose Brahms—

LANCELOT. Never ! Adieu and farewell. (Great sweeping gesture.) I must give Brahms his money back, so I'll be glad of the two hundred I lent you at Leipsic.

PETER (overwhelmed). Oh, Lancelot. I—

LANCELOT (claps him on the back). But I must draw the line at the fifty interest.

PETER. I dare say you're right—I'm only a tea-merchant.

(MARY ANN reappears and helps him on with his coat.)

Oh, but this will give you a free year for work ! Oh, Lancelot—how glorious !

LANCELOT (*feverishly*). Yes, I must work—I must work. Come. I'm so glad I'm not alone to-night. (*Links arm in PETER'S.*) Yes, a free year for work—for work!

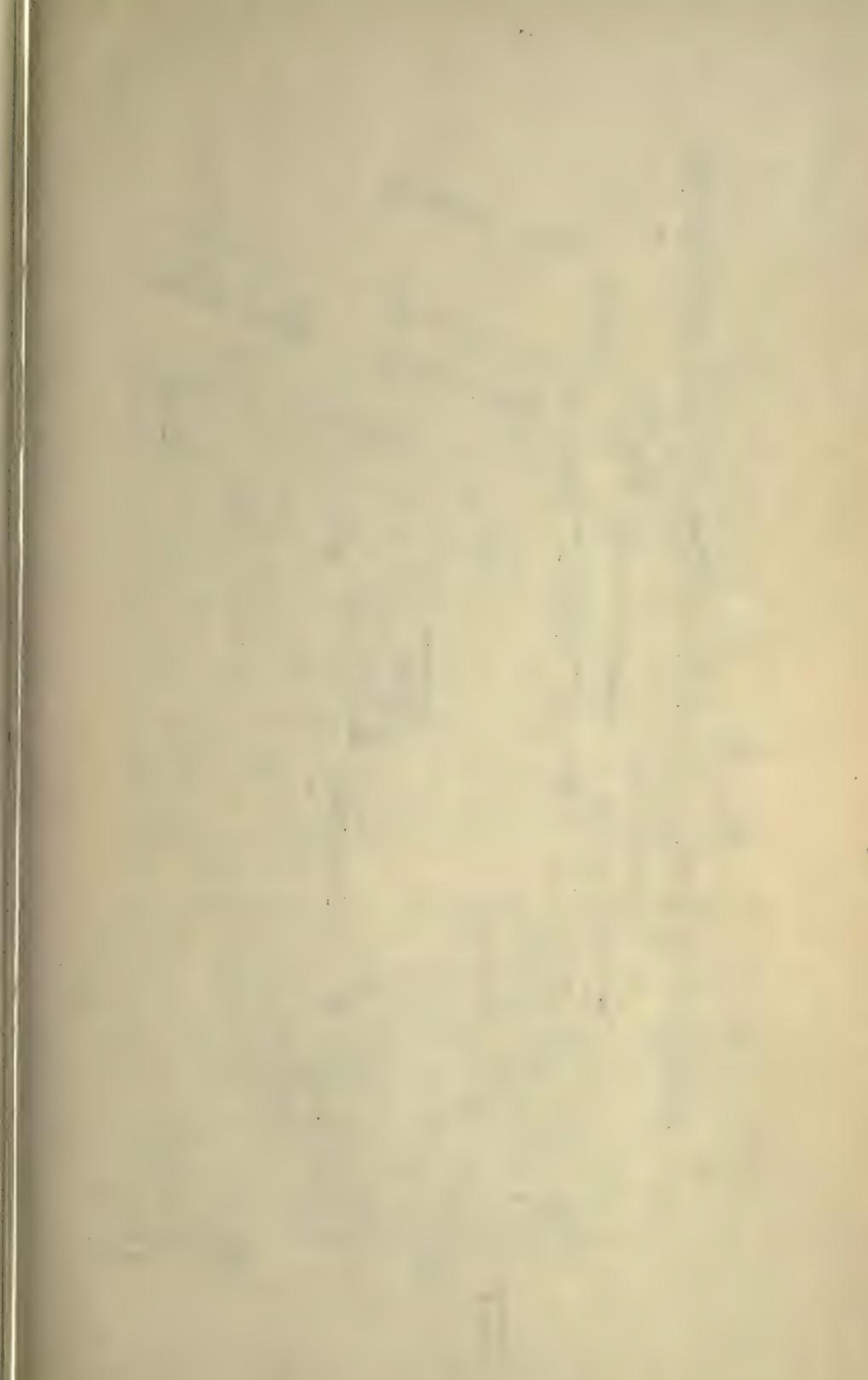
(*Exeunt.*)

(*Pause.* MARY ANN stands stonily as they are heard descending the stairs and opening door. The door slams. Then she rushes to window and throws it open. Noise of cab driving off—she snaps down window, staggers blindly, tears streaming down her cheeks. She turns to canary cage on table c.)

MARY ANN. Good-bye, Dick! Good-bye! You're his now. Good-bye, Dick. I shall never see you again. Take care of he. Sing to he. Don't let he be miserable. Sing to he. Sing to he.

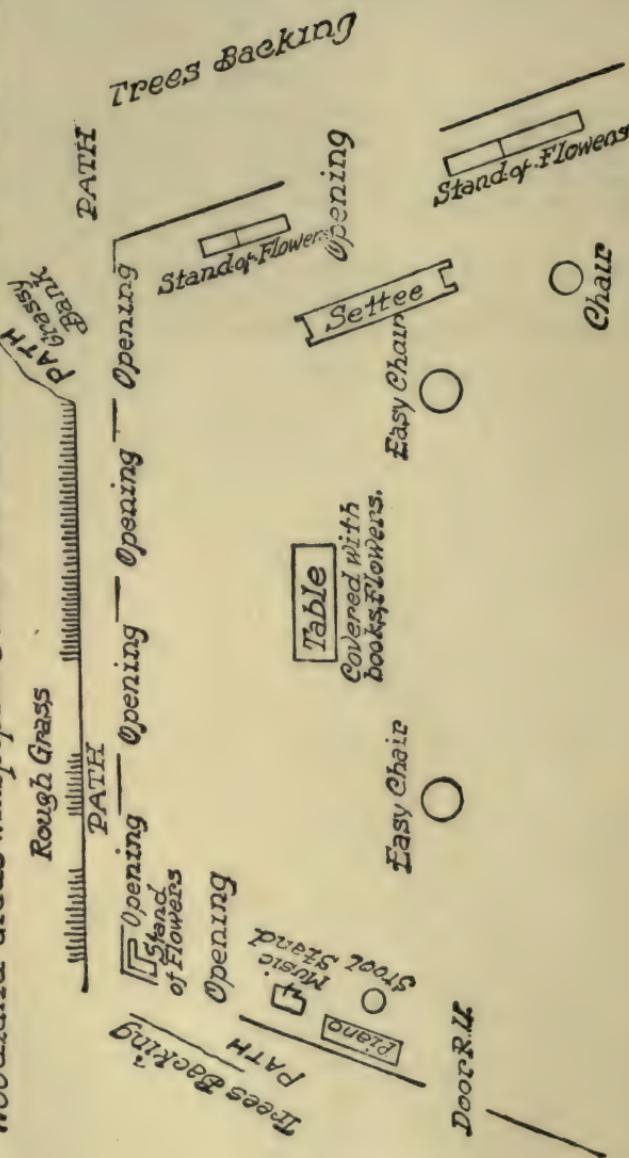
(Falls against cage in a passion of tears.)

CURTAIN.



## ACT IV

*Woodland Glade with poplars to R and distant Sussex downs backing*



## ACT IV

*A Garden Room. At back, piers of brickwork about 2 feet wide and about 6 feet apart, the open spaces between which give on to a woodland glade. A narrow, mossy, earth path runs along immediately outside the room and is broken into two at L. corner by a grassy bank full of wild-flowers. In the middle distance R. poplars are seen with a shadowy young moon already risen between them. On the horizon is a blue haze of Sussex Downs. The season is August, and the time late afternoon. The room has also a large opening at R.L. and another at L.C., which give a view of trees. At the side of each opening there should be a suggestion of folding or sliding glass doors, which can be shut when required, but which are now drawn back as far as possible. An ordinary door R.U. gives upon an inside corridor. In the room is a piano and piano-stool, a music-stand, a table covered with books, writing materials, flowers, etc., a settee, stands of flowers, and a couple of comfortable chairs. The furniture should be as simple as possible and preferably of unstained oak, giving a cottage aspect. As the curtain rises the songs of thrushes and blackbirds outside possess the scene for an instant. Then MRS. LEADBATTER and ROSIE appear on outside back, advancing from R. towards L. They are clad in their best summer frocks, and sporting elegant parasols. They stop outside one of the central openings, and look into the room.*

MRS. LEADBATTER. Why, whatever's this? An 'alfway 'ouse—'alfway to bein' an 'ouse, I should say. Rosie, them chairs looks hinviding. (*Steps into room.*)

ROSIE. Oh, Ma, we mustn't! (*Follows hesitatingly.*) Suppose whoever it belongs to comes in and finds us.

MRS. LEADBATTER. And 'ooever could it belong to but Mary Ann? (*Plumps into a chair and searches for pocket to extract handkerchief.* ROSIE meanwhile perches timidly on the edge of another chair.) Didn't the lady in the 'ouse by the big gate tell us that was the beginning of the property? Besides, we've got to wait 'ere for Mr. Smedge, else we shan't know which of them two paths to foller. (*Fans face with large white handkerchief.*) Shouldn't wonder if Mary Ann 'adn't 'ad this place put on purpose so that visitors could set down an' cool off a bit. Fancy 'er 'avin' a garding like this—as big as Hepping Forest! An' six years ago she 'ad only a bird! (*Mimics*) Sweet! Sweet!

**ROSIE** (*more genteel than ever*). Hush, Ma ! She wouldn't like it if anybody heard you. And her name is Miss Marian now. (*Footsteps heard outside.*) That will be Mr. Smedge.

(REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE appears on outside path R. and walks along it towards L. *He is fatter, greyer, and perspiring.*)

**MRS. LEADBATTER.** Mr. Smedge ! Lord, ee's struck deaf and blind. (*Louder.*) Your 'oliness !

**ROSIE** (*rising and running towards back*). Mr. Smedge !

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*stopping and looking in at opening*). Mrs. O'Gorman. (*He steps in.*) I see you have both taken refuge from the heat in our dear Marian's favourite retreat. (*Wipes his forehead.*) You would little think that this was originally a gamekeeper's cottage, but, of course, it has been practically rebuilt. I will go round and see if Marian is anywhere in the vicinity ; you would thus be spared the long walk to the mansion. (*Exit R.L. and turning sharp forward passes out of sight.*)

**MRS. LEADBATTER.** More of a pulling down than a re-building, I should call it. Funny sort of an 'ouse with no walls.

**ROSIE.** Lor, Ma ! It has only been opened out to make it more countrified.

**MRS. LEADBATTER.** Rubbridge ! 'Ouses in the country 'as walls jest the same as 'ouses in towns. 'Ow could you 'ave winders if yer didn't 'ave walls ? But you are always trying to make out that the mother 'oo bore you is a fool. P'raps she was—to 'ave you.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*reappearing R.L.*). There is no sign of anyone. I fear I must get back to the Rectory, but you cannot now miss your way. Just keep to the right where the path forks and then follow it through the copse.

**MRS. LEADBATTER.** But suppose the cops won't let us !

**ROSIE.** Oh, Ma ! The copse is the wood. I hope the foxes won't bite us.

**MRS. LEADBATTER.** No fear, Rosie—we're neither of us chickens. It's Mary Ann I'm frightened of—all in 'er silks and diamonds. Do come with us, your 'oliness !

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. If you're so nervous of Miss Marian, why didn't you bring Mr. O'Gorman ?

**MRS. LEADBATTER.** He's at the Music-hall Festival.

**ROSIE.** Musical Festival, Ma ! My husband is a critic now, Mr. Smedge, a musical critic. He's busy cutting up Mr. Lancelot's new work.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. But that won't be performed till Monday !

**ROSIE.** Pat's paper can't wait. *Flats and Sharps* goes to press Monday.

**MRS. LEADBATTER.** He's jealous, your 'oliness, of the days when Mr. Lancelot gave Rosie pianner lessons.

**ROSIE** (*sniggering, pleased*). Oh, Ma !

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*hurriedly, as he sees a figure approaching towards opening L.C.*). If you stroll on now, Mrs. Leadbatter, you may even meet Miss Marian. (*He almost pushes MRS. LEADBATTER and ROSIE out of opening at back.*)

(Enter the COUNTESS OF CHELMER, L.C., a well-preserved matron, richly dressed, her bare head protected by a parasol, which she puts down on entering.)

LADY CHELMER. You here, Mr. Smedge. Coming to squeeze more out of Marian, I suppose!

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*indignantly*). Why, I haven't set eyes on her to-day!

LADY CHELMER. She's not in this folly of hers?

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Certainly not.

LADY CHELMER. I beg your pardon—but it's too bad the way she hides herself just when Lord Valentine's down.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Lord Valentine?

LADY CHELMER. Arrived last night with his usual unexpectedness—looking quite worn out, poor dear boy. (*Sits.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. I don't wonder—even a single night in London takes it out of me. (*Sits.*)

LADY CHELMER. Yes, and may I advise you to let London take it out of you even less in the future. For if dear Marian discovers that her generous impulse to offer you one of the livings here is repaid by—

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Lady Chelmer! I hardly know to what you refer. My little trips to town are necessitated purely by parochial concerns.

LADY CHELMER. So I told Marian.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. I am grateful for the testimony—true as it is. And as I have never had a word alone with you since I was called to my new charge, let me congratulate you on the improvement in dear Marian. There are moments when I positively forget she is not one of ourselves.

LADY CHELMER. Yes, yes. But I am still troubled by her shyness and reclusiveness. Imagine the way she coops herself up here for instance, when she has a historic mansion, and a dozen men-servants at her disposal. Early habits take terrible root, Mr. Smedge. The trouble I had to stop her milking the cows—just when I was working day and night to get her hands soft! And when she gossips with the labourers and village-wives—and one can't always stop her—she is even liable to slip back into her dialect.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*distressed*). Tut! Tut!

LADY CHELMER. Mr. Smedge, you and I must work together to bring her to a healthier state of mind!

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Only too delighted. When my poor wife died, it was a great wrench to part with her—with Marian, I mean, not my wife—(*confused*) that is to say—

LADY CHELMER. I quite understand. And I am as attached to Marian as you are. There is only one thing that would put an end to her moping in her woods, pottering about her cow-sheds, or playing dismal tunes on her piano in the twilight.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. And that is ?

LADY CHELMER. A husband !

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Ha ! (Rises.)

LADY CHELMER. The old house needs a master to liven it up.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*enthusiastically*). Yes, and the old rafters should ring with the laughter of little children.

LADY CHELMER. How beautifully you put it.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*modestly*). It is not only in the pulpit that inspirations come to one.

LADY CHELMER (*rising*). Then I shall look to you to persuade Marian into matrimony.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*startled*). To me ?

LADY CHELMER. Aren't you her guide, philosopher and friend ? Has it never occurred to you to broach the idea to her ?

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. I will not deny that the thought has occasionally crossed my mind. . . . But would she have me ?

LADY CHELMER. You !! (Goes off into a peal of hearty laughter.) Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*red and confused*). Isn't that what you were suggesting ?

LADY CHELMER. You and that child ! I'm surprised at you, Mr. Smedge. I've got you a fat living out of the business—isn't that enough ?

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. With every respect, Lady Chelmer, I got you a still fatter living out of it. And if she marries a stranger, who will naturally take over the reins, what will become of *you* ? Wouldn't it be better, dear Lady Chelmer, to keep Marian in the family, so to speak ?

LADY CHELMER. Precisely what I propose to do !

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*gasping*). You don't mean to say that Lord Valentine——!

LADY CHELMER. You are positively inspired to-day !

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Marry Marian to Lord Valentine !

(LORD VALENTINE CHELMER is heard outside R. whistling for his dog.)

Talk of the devil——!

LADY CHELMER. Mr. Smedge .

(LORD VALENTINE CHELMER is seen on outside back path R. moving towards L. He is a young man in jacket and gaiters, with a pipe in his mouth. A careless, sporting type, dissipated, but not without character.)

LADY CHELMER. Hullo, darling ! Looking for Marian ?

LORD VALENTINE (*looking in at first opening*). No, mumsey, for Binny. (Whistles again.) How d'ye do, Smedge ?

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*dismally*). I bear up, Lord Valentine, I bear up. Had a nice walk?

LORD VALENTINE. Jolly. We caught five rats. (*Moving along path towards L.*)

LADY CHELMER (*shocked*). Rats? Have you been ratting?

LORD VALENTINE (*looking in at second opening*). What else is there to do now Marian has gone cranky about the poor birds and stopped the shooting parties? Jolly rot, I call it. What's the good of preserving game, if you don't preserve it? Ha! Ha! Ha! Jolly good joke. What? (*Whistling*.) Binny! Binny! That dog never knows when he's had enough. Rough on rats. What? Well, ta-ta, parson. (*Moving along path towards L.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. But I'll see you in church to-morrow?

LORD VALENTINE (*looking in at third opening*). I should have loved to come, and it's jolly good of you to want me—but you see I've got to go up to-night on urgent business. Jolly nuisance! (*Whistles, walking off L.*)

LADY CHELMER. Stop your ratting, Val—I want to talk to you seriously.

LORD VALENTINE (*looking in at fourth opening*). I must find Binny! (*Exit along path towards L.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. You can't really think that he and Marian—?

LADY CHELMER. Val has his faults, I know. But his is just the full rich nature she needs to supplement hers.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. And hers is just the full rich bank-balance he needs to supplement his.

LADY CHELMER (*getting angry*). Come! Come! Don't be a dog in the manger. I should never have let Marian have you here, had I dreamed you would be an opposing influence.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. So your real object was that I might persuade Marian to marry your—

LADY CHELMER. Don't twist my words. Marian has a childish respect for you—God knows why. You might show your gratitude to me by helping my boy.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. I thought that you owed me gratitude. After all, you were living on commissions from tradesmen.

LADY CHELMER. Insolence! To think that with my own hands I have brought a wolf into the fold.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. So I am a wolf! And the lamb is Lord Valentine, I suppose.

LADY CHELMER. He is my lamb, anyhow, my ewe lamb, and I will fight for him tooth and nail. By the way, the second living here is, as you know, still fatter and the incumbent is nearly ninety. It had been my hope—

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Do not try to bribe Samuel Smedge . . . I should be the first to support your project if I could conscientiously believe—

LADY CHELMER. What can be your objection ? Lord Valentine will put the climax on Marian's career. He will add rank to riches.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. But you said yourself he has his faults.

LADY CHELMER. Who has not ? If he is a little wild, that's the very reason you ought, as a Christian minister, to help him to settle down.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. There's something in that.

LADY CHELMER. Promise me at least you won't run him down to her.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Why should I go out of my way—?

LADY CHELMER. But if she consults you ?

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Since I know nothing at first hand—

LADY CHELMER. Oh, thank you ! I'm sorry I lost my temper. But your unruffled saintliness is my best rebuke. And let me apologize most humbly for thinking that material considerations—

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*magnificently waving away the apology*). But are you sure Lord Valentine desires the union ?

LADY CHELMER. Why, he looks upon Marian as his Countess.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. But he spoke so disrespectfully of her.

LADY CHELMER. Shows he feels practically married. But I should warn you he knows nothing of her lodging-house past. We are a fastidious family, we Chelmers. He believes she's the daughter of a gentleman farmer. Fortunately by the time you handed her over to me— (*Is facing L., and now perceives LORD VALENTINE returning and approaching opening L.C.*) Hush !

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. I'll go and look for her. (*Goes towards back.*)

LADY CHELMER. And you won't forget your beautiful sentiment about the old rafters ?

(Enter L.C., LORD VALENTINE.)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*passing him*). Ha ! Found Binny ? (*Turning at exit.*) Is he really ninety, Lady Chelmer ?

LADY CHELMER (*startled*). Binny ?

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. No, no . . . The second incumbent.

LADY CHELMER. He looks a hundred, and it's time he had a hint about resigning.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Ha ! (*Jovially.*) Good-bye, Lord Valentine. (*Significantly.*) We shall all meet in church some day. (*Exit back, turning L.*)

LORD VALENTINE. Now for your sermon, mumsey ! Make it short, won't you, for I must skedaddle.

LADY CHELMER (*agitated*). You're not really going up to town ?

LORD VALENTINE. Yes, I am.

LADY CHELMER (*angry*). One of your gay supper-parties, I suppose. You *must* settle down, Val, you really must. You've sown enough wild oats to stock a farm.

LORD VALENTINE. What awful exaggeration !

LADY CHELMER. I don't care. I'm tired of warding off fortune-hunters from Marian. The strain is too great. I was positively relieved when she stopped your shooting-parties—it kept off young men. But I can't always keep them out of my house-parties—I am expecting a couple now. And when you had the field to yourself, you went after rats !

LORD VALENTINE. Going after rats is so jolly exciting. Marian one can catch like a tame rabbit.

LADY CHELMER. Tame rabbits can give trouble too. Don't count your rabbits before they're hatched.

LORD CHELMER. Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Jolly funny. But surely Marian understands that some day—

LADY CHELMER. She understands nothing of the kind. You never talk to her.

LORD VALENTINE. She's so jolly proper. (*Laughingly.*) Why are you so jolly anxious to become the Dowager Countess ?

LADY CHELMER. Because I'm getting old. Where would you be if I were to die ?

LORD VALENTINE. At the funeral, I suppose.

LADY CHELMER (*bitterly*). Yes, and jolly.

LORD VALENTINE. No, mumsey, don't talk rot ! Besides, you're not going to die.

LADY CHELMER. You will certainly kill me if you go on like this. And you will be left as penniless as I was when your father died after eating up my fortune.

LORD VALENTINE. Don't run down my father. After all, you were only a tradesman's daughter. He left you a countess.

LADY CHELMER. What's the good of being a countess with nothing to count ? And if you talk to me like that, you get no more cheques from me.

LORD VALENTINE. All right. Don't be so jolly shirty.

LADY CHELMER. Don't use that word "jolly"—it maddens me.

LORD VALENTINE. I shall speak as I jolly well please.

LADY CHELMER. Very well, pack your bag and carry it to Brighton. It's only nine miles—a jolly walk ! I'd feel ashamed for you to meet Peter here.

LORD VALENTINE. Is Peter coming *here* ?

LADY CHELMER. I saw him yesterday at Brighton for the first time since I severed my business connection.

MARIAN (*without Back L.*). Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Of course, dear.

LADY CHELMER. There ! Do you hear ? She seems strangely happier—I wonder if Mr. Smedge has already hinted your affection.

LORD VALENTINE. Mr. Smedge ? What jolly cheek !

LADY CHELMER. I thought it would make it easier for you, darling.

MARIAN (*without*). Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

LORD VALENTINE. Already crowing over my capture ! I won't be trapped like a rat. (*Flings off R.L.*)

LADY CHELMER (*following*). But Val, Val——!

MARIAN (*just outside Back L.*). Run along, dear—or it'll all be gone !

(Enter MARIAN at *Back L.* opening in a simple but pretty frock and hat. No gloves. Her face is maturer with signs of thought and suffering. She comes forward.)

LADY CHELMER (*returning*). My darling Marian ! Wherever have you been ?

MARIAN. Romping with a hundred children.

LADY CHELMER. Good heavens ! Not those Cockney excursionists I saw playing on the green ?

MARIAN. Yes, poor pale little things ! I thought it would be more fun for them to see our pigs and orchards.

LADY CHELMER. If only they haven't trampled on the flower-beds and left greasy paper on the lawns !

MARIAN. What does it matter ? They were happy. And so was I—for half an hour !

LADY CHELMER. Has—er—has Mr. Smedge spoken to you ?

MARIAN. Yes, only a few minutes ago. He was perfectly charming. He said I ought to make the old rafters ring with the laughter of little children.

LADY CHELMER (*beaming*). And you agreed ?

MARIAN (*simply*). Of course. I did it at once.

LADY CHELMER (*gaspings*). Did it at once ?

MARIAN. Sent the children into the dining-room—that's got the oldest rafters, you know. They're having tea now.

LADY CHELMER (*horrified*). A hundred children !

MARIAN (*simply*). It may be a hundred and twenty. The servants are so nice about it—they are all waiting on them. I began serving too—everybody was surprised at my professional skill—only unfortunately your week-end guests drove up, and I fled.

LADY CHELMER (*horrified*). Oh, but I must get back at once. There'll be nothing left for them.

MARIAN. Can't they go without for once ?

(Enter HOWARD L.C., a footman in gold lace, powdered wig, etc., carrying her tea on a tray with a silver tea-set.)

MARIAN. Ah, there's something left for me, anyhow. This table seems rather crowded, Howard. I will get the little one from the next room.

HOWARD (*shocked*). Oh, miss, I will get it. (*Deposits tray on table, finding place with difficulty, and exit R.U.*)

MARIAN. How kind of you !

LADY CHELMER. Darling ! You know you can't speak to Howard like that—as if he were your equal !

MARIAN (*her simplicity for the first time tinctured with conscious mischief*). Don't you think I've got up to him yet ?

LADY CHELMER. Don't be ridiculous. Servants only despise one if one isn't rigid with them.

(HOWARD *re-appears R.U., carrying a small table.*)

How many visitors have arrived, Howard ?

HOWARD. Ten, my lady. One of the cars brought the luggage of two others who had started some hours earlier to walk from Brighton. (*No more notice is taken of him. He arranges tea and exits at L.C.*)

LADY CHELMER. Walking in this heat ? We can guess who the two fools are, can't we, Marian ?

MARIAN (*hardly listening*). Can we ?

LADY CHELMER. Why, Peter and his Lancelot, of course.

MARIAN (*startled*). His Lancelot ?

LADY CHELMER. Oh, I meant to keep it as a pleasant surprise for you. I know how you adore his music. You'll put on a decent dress this evening, won't you ?

MARIAN (*pale, murmurs*). Do you mean a less decent dress ?

LADY CHELMER. Darling, you know decency is a matter of fashion. The day may come when our dresses won't be low at the neck, but high at the knee. And you won't forget yourself, practising, and be late for dinner, will you ?

MARIAN. Don't be alarmed—I shall not come to dinner.

LADY CHELMER. Not come ? Oh, Marian ! And Val was so looking forward to taking you in ! What can be your reason ?

MARIAN. Dinner comes at the wrong hour.

LADY CHELMER. The wrong hour ?

MARIAN. Just when the sunset will be turning the wood into fairyland. Besides, I don't care to meet this Mr. Lancelot.

LADY CHELMER. Not meet the lion of the day ?

MARIAN. No. Musicians, unlike children, should be heard and not seen. It is apt to disillusion one.

LADY CHELMER. Ah, but one takes it for granted geniuses will have feet of clay. I wasn't at all surprised to read the stories about him in *Flats and Sharps*.

MARIAN (*perturbed*). The stories ? What stories ?

LADY CHELMER. Oh, the usual gamblings and goings-on of these Bohemians. It seems he was a baronet's son, but his father disinherited him for his extravagances.

MARIAN (*hotly*). It is a malicious libel. Mr. Lancelot's only extravagance was burning his landlady's gas all night, his only gambling was tossing whether to dine off a chop or a steak, and rather than write for the debased taste of his time he lived in one room !

(HOWARD *must by now be gone off.*)

LADY CHELMER. Darling, how can you know that ?

MARIAN. I was the slavey in his lodging-house !

LADY CHELMER (*looking round apprehensively*). Hush ! Hush ! . . . Such language ! . . . Then it was very right of you not to wish to meet him. Thank you, dear. It would have been very awkward for me, had he recognized you—and for my guests too.

MARIAN. Do you think they'd have all gone away ?

LADY CHELMER. No, but they mightn't have come again.

MARIAN. They don't mind meeting Mr. Lancelot, though they think he was a gambler and a rake ?

LADY CHELMER. My dear ! Lions obey only the laws of the jungle.

MARIAN. But all your other guests—are *they* good ?

LADY CHELMER. Darling, one doesn't ask for Sunday-school certificates.

MARIAN. Then the only people they really object to meeting are people like me—who have been poor and worked !

LADY CHELMER (*uneasily*). They don't object if they don't know.

MARIAN. Then I am feeding them under false pretences. (*Rises.*)

LADY CHELMER. What a strange way of putting it !

MARIAN. Wouldn't it be better, Lady Chelmer, instead of feeding rich people under false pretences to feed poor people frankly ? This house and grounds would make an ideal orphanage.

LADY CHELMER (*appalled*). An orphanage ?

MARIAN. Yes, Mr. Smedge was quite right. I must make the old rafters ring with the laughter of little children. I daresay the orphanage people wouldn't mind my living on here.

LADY CHELMER (*her world crashing*). And what about me ?

MARIAN. Oh, Lady Chelmer, don't you think you've refined me enough now ? Especially as I shall be seeing only poor London children.

LADY CHELMER. This is utter moonshine, Marian.

MARIAN. I like moonshine—before you have finished dinner it will be lying over the landscape like a mist of white roses.

LADY CHELMER (*changing tactics*). Yes, yes, it will be very pretty. (*Shepherding her to table.*) Drink your tea, dear, it will soothe your nerves.

MARIAN (*dropping on chair*). I don't want any tea. My nerves will be all right when I get the children down here, when I get back to my own world, the world I should never have deserted. Oh ! (*breaking down*) since I've been rich I've never had a day's happiness !

LADY CHELMER (*amazed*). You hanker after your London lodging-house ?

MARIAN. No, of course not ! . . . And if I do ! . . . (*Stamps foot.*) Let me be ! You will never understand. (*Drops her head*

*on the table and surrenders herself to bitter-sweet memories of the days with LANCELOT.)*

(LADY CHELMER, with a hopeless gesture, turns away and exits L.C.)

(For an instant the birds outside and the silent MARIAN hold the stage. Then MRS. LEADBATTER and ROSIE are seen along back path from L. They are carrying in their gloved hands masses of willow herb, convolvulus, meadowsweet, and other late wildflowers which they have picked.)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*looking in*). Why, there she is! (*Impulsively*) Mary Ann!

MARIAN (*automatically*). Yes'm! (*Starts up, gropes dreamily, espies tea-tray, snatches it up dazedly.*) I'm so sorry, Mum!

ROSIE (*horrified*). Miss Marian! (*Rushes forward and takes tray away with a little struggle, almost as in Act III.*)

MARIAN (*vaguely*). Eh? (*Waking up.*) Mrs. Leadbatter and Rosie! . . . What are you doing here?

MRS. LEADBATTER. We're on our 'oneymoon! Rosie, she's married Mr. O'Gorman. You remember Mr. O'Gorman, the newspaper gentleman as slept all day and was away all night?

MARIAN. I congratulate you, Mrs. O'Gorman.

ROSIE (*with tittering shyness*). Thank you, Miss Marian. But my husband's *home* all night now.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Yes, he's become a cricket.

(ROSIE is about to correct her.)

MARIAN. A cricket?

MRS. LEADBATTER. A musical cricket.

MARIAN (*smiling*). Ah, the critic on the hearth! . . . What beautiful flowers! You'll sit down and have some tea, won't you?

MRS. LEADBATTER. I don't mind if I do, Miss Marian.

(MRS. LEADBATTER and ROSIE sit down. Business disposing their flowers and parasols. MARIAN pours out tea.)

MARIAN. I'm afraid there's only one cup.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Never mind. Rosie can 'ave the saucer.

ROSIE. Oh, Ma! I ain't a cat. I can wait my turn.

MARIAN. Well, if you don't mind—it's rather a journey to the house. . . . (*Pours tea.*)

ROSIE. I can begin on the cake.

MARIAN. Do, Mrs. O'Gorman. Help yourself.

(For a moment only the sounds of munching and gurgling and a rare bird break the silence of the summer afternoon.)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Lord love us, Miss Marian. This is quite like old times.

MARIAN (*with a half-sob*). The dear old times when I used to stand in the passage listening to the piano.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Yes, wasn't Rosie a wonder! Would you like a tune now?

MARIAN. Oh, we mustn't trouble her.

ROSIE (*turning over music*). There's no real music here . . . (*Taking up a piece*.) Ah, here's Mr. Lancelot's "Meadow-sweet." Treacle, Pat calls it—an imitation of Keeley Lesterre. Do you like it, Miss Marian?

MARIAN (*ignoring her*). Will you have some more tea, Mrs. Leadbatter?

MRS. LEADBATTER. If there's time, my dear. (*Pulls out watch with difficulty*.) My word! Bustle, Rosie, or we shall miss the sharrybank! (*Snatches up parasol and flowers*.)

ROSIE. But I'm so thirsty!

MRS. LEADBATTER. I can't be out at all hours with my hasthma!

MARIAN. I'll show you the short cut to the road. (*Exit Back. Follows path towards L. and takes L. fork. Exit MRS. LEADBATTER. ROSIE manages to linger and, though hampered by her flowers and parasol, to take a swift swig at the spout of the teapot, draining it dry, ere she runs after them. LADY CHELMER and LORD VALENTINE return by L.C.*)

LADY CHELMER (*vexed*). There! Now that you've promised to propose, she's not here!

LORD VALENTINE. Well, don't blame me. And do let me catch my train.

(*Re-enter MARIAN, coming in at back.*)

MARIAN (*suddenly perceiving LADY CHELMER*). I thought you had heaps of guests.

LADY CHELMER. Val and I have been having a heart-to-heart talk. But you are quite right. I must run. *Au revoir*, you dear young people! (*Exit L.C.*)

LORD VALENTINE (*advancing towards her*). Why do you always shrink into your shell? Why does a fellow never see you?

MARIAN. You've seen me on and off for years.

LORD VALENTINE. On and off! That's just it. When I'm on, you're off.

MARIAN. I thought it was the other way round.

LORD VALENTINE. Poor little girl! Did she think I avoided her? Was she vexed?

MARIAN. No, I was delighted.

LORD VALENTINE. Eh? Don't be so jolly shy. (*Comes nearer.*) Try to forget my position. Let's talk as equals. Why do you always look so jolly miserable?

MARIAN. Why do you always look so miserably jolly?

LORD VALENTINE. I'm not so jolly jolly when I'm down here.

You ought to see me in London—one giddy whirl. Ah, you must come to London.

MARIAN. I've been there . . . years.

LORD VALENTINE. Have you? I never knew. And did you have a giddy time?

MARIAN. Yes, indeed. Hardly ever in bed. (*Sitting on piano-stool.*) You'll forgive me, I want to practise.

LORD VALENTINE. That's all right. Don't mind me. I'm used to talking when people play.

MARIAN. You're sure I shan't put you out?

LORD VALENTINE. Quite. I'm so glad you do play. You could learn to accompany my comic songs. I only vamp the accompaniment.

MARIAN. I'm sure you'd enjoy yourself better with the visitors.

LORD VALENTINE. Not at all. I'm enjoying myself top-hole. I'm quite surprised—I mean—oh I say, this is jolly, isn't it? We've never had a real talk before. You don't smoke, do you?

MARIAN (*rummaging among music*). No, thank you.

LORD VALENTINE. I couldn't bear a wife who smoked. Men should be men and women women—what?

MARIAN (*finding her piece*). It seems difficult not to be. (*Arranges music on stand, hardly listening to his babble*).

LORD VALENTINE. Ah, you know what I mean. One wants to marry a womanly woman—at the same time one doesn't want her always hanging round one's neck. I couldn't give up my clubs and my golfing, what?

MARIAN (*impatiently touching keys*). Why ever should you?

LORD VALENTINE. Ah, you're a sport, a real sport. No, don't play after all. I'm getting quite excited.

MARIAN (*vaguely*). What are you excited about?

LORD VALENTINE. Why, the whole jolly business. It's all jumping so beautifully.

MARIAN (*looking round dazedly*). Jumping! What's jumping?

LORD VALENTINE. Oh, can't you understand? (*Seizing her hand*.) I want you to be the Countess of Chelmer!

MARIAN (*dazed*). You want me to be your mother!!

LORD VALENTINE. No, no, my wife.

MARIAN. Your wife, Lord Valentine? (*Wrests her hand away*.) Is that what you've been talking about?

LORD VALENTINE. Didn't you understand? I knew you'd be surprised.

MARIAN. I am indeed. But it's utterly impossible, Lord Valentine. We are too far apart.

LORD VALENTINE. But I asked you to forget the difference.

MARIAN. How can I forget that I've cleaned a hundred men's boots and you've never even cleaned your own.

LORD VALENTINE (*recoiling*). What are you talking about?

MARIAN. That was the good time I had in London. When you were coming home from a ball, I was scrabbing the doorstep.

LORD VALENTINE. You are joking. Why, your hand is as soft as mine.

MARIAN. But my head is not—not so soft, I mean, as to believe it is *me* you want. Tell me, Lord Valentine, would you have wanted me if I hadn't a penny?

LORD VALENTINE. I don't say that. A fellow can't marry beyond his means.

MARIAN. Ha! Ha! Ha! That's the first good thing you've said. Let's part friends. (*Holds out hand.*)

LORD VALENTINE (*reconquered by its warmth and softness*). But why part? Nobody knows your past?

MARIAN. I know something of yours. (*Drops hand.*) And I couldn't dream of marrying you.

LORD VALENTINE (*taken aback*). Eh? . . . Your head is swollen, my girl! Money is not everything.

MARIAN. No, indeed. Had my money been yours and I scrubbing steps, I still would not have married you.

LORD VALENTINE. You'd never have got the chance, my dear. And you're a jolly little fool not to take it now.

MARIAN. I hope no woman will ever take it, Lord Valentine. I don't think a man with your idea of life ought to marry at all.

(*Disappears through door R.U. and turns key.*)

LORD VALENTINE. D—n the minx! Well, I'm not going to break my heart over a slavey. I can just catch my train. (*Exit L.C.*)

(Enter along back path from R. LANCELOT and PETER in country clothes, with sticks. LANCELOT seems graver, but PETER is eternally ageless.)

LANCELOT (*stopping short*). I say, Peter. This is getting too swell for me. Here's a second lodge!

PETER. Nonsense—it's more of a summer-house. Let's go in. It looks comfortable.

LANCELOT (*following PETER in*). Still worse. A super-summer-house! Why do you drag me among such beastly plutocrats? Hullo! Here's a piano. (*Sits down on piano-stool and touches a note or two.*) Nice tone. Are they musical?

PETER (*smiling*). Lady Chelmer doesn't know "God Save the King" from "The Old Swanee River" except by the men taking off their hats. (*Sinks down on settee.*)

LANCELOT. Then why the devil did you . . . ?

PETER. What the deuce could you do over Sunday in Brighton? The hotels are full of bounders and their females and cases of jewellery to tempt them. London would be even duller. Here, you'll

recover from the rehearsal and she'll send you down to your Monday performance in thirteen minutes in her new car.

LANCELOT (*amazed*). And this is the lady who used to puff your tea ?

PETER. She has puffed everything—except cigars ! (*Laughs at his joke.*)

LANCELOT. And do you mean to say she has puffed herself out this size ? (*Waves arm towards grounds.*)

PETER (*laughingly*). No, no. She came into this property some years ago, and at once renounced my tea and all her other sins of commission. (*Moves on.*) I never saw her again till the car nearly ran over me yesterday.

LANCELOT. Well, who plays the piano then ? The Puffer's progeny ?

PETER. There is only one son, and I shouldn't think he'd be musical.

LANCELOT. He probably isn't and plays "Kiss me good-night."

PETER. Leave the dead alone. More likely "Meadowsweet" nowadays.

LANCELOT. Shut up. (*Revolves on music-stool and shakes his fist.*) I wish to Heaven I'd never come to this music-forsaken spot.

PETER. Be thankful for your mercies. Not every hostess would provide such a half-way house. Even tea ! I wonder if there is any left. (*Examines the pot.*) No such luck ! (*Rises and crosses to music-stand.*)

LANCELOT. The piano-playing son has drunk it all. He's a greedy brute !

PETER (*turning over music*). He is a she.

LANCELOT. How do you make that out ?

PETER (*mysteriously*). And she plays your music.

LANCELOT. How strange ! (*Gets up and looks over PETER's shoulder at the music.*)

PETER. Don't be so modest.

LANCELOT (*snatching the music*). Why, I'm her favourite composer !

PETER. Don't be so conceited !

LANCELOT. Clear as daylight. "To Marian with love from Caroline Chelmer." Lady Chelmer, you say, knows no music. Therefore she picks out what she thinks will please this Marian best.

PETER. But this happens to be "Meadowsweet"; it only proves she picks out the piece that's the rage. Besides, it's dated Christmas, and it's still new and unplayed.

LANCELOT. Yah, but here's a second copy, with all the signs of wear !

PETER. Didn't I say it sold like "Kiss me—?" (*Dodges LANCELOT's menace.*) Well, what's wrong in a big seller ? Is popularity a proof of badness ?

LANCELOT. Not a proof, but—

PETER. But fiddlesticks ! What English music owes you—and it owes you a good deal, old chap—is absolutely irrespective of what your *publisher* owes you. Why then this morbid sensitiveness over the “Meadowsweet” craze ? (*Sits down.*)

LANCELOT (*slowly*). I will tell you, Peter, once for all—but on condition you never bring up the subject again ! (*Drops on music-stool.*)

PETER. Fire away !

LANCELOT. I don’t like chaff about “Meadowsweet” because “Meadowsweet” is sacred to me.

PETER (*impressed, despite himself*). Sacred ?

LANCELOT (*solemnly*). Once there was a girl—a country girl—whiter than the first buds of spring. All faith and lovely innocence—that’s what I tried to put into “Meadowsweet.”

PETER. Sounds very beautiful, old chap, but I remember taking up “Meadowsweet” when it was in the writing, and the only nymphs around were the Sisters Trippet, the detestable Rosie, and a slatternly Mary Ann.

LANCELOT. Nevertheless, Peter, in that wilderness of mean streets this wonderful wild-flower blossomed.

PETER (*rising*). Then you’re a deeper, darker chap than I ever imagined. Anyhow, it only proves that—abuse the public as you may—when a man really writes from his heart—(*dodging LANCELOT’s threat*) oh, all right ! I’m mum. Come along ! We must be getting up to the house.

LANCELOT. Not yet. You’ve stirred up the old mood. And this little place seems full of her.

(*The birds sing outside. The door R.U. slowly opens. MARIAN, without a hat now, but with a piece of music in her hand, emerges broodingly. At sight of the men she half retreats, and hides her face with the music. LANCELOT springs up.*)

PETER. I’m afraid we’re trespassing. But we didn’t quite know the way to the house and—

MARIAN (*tremulous, her face still half-hidden*). Along the path there and keep to the right where it branches.

PETER. Thank you. (*Turns and walks towards back.*)

LANCELOT (*desperately*). I—I suppose we shall meet again at the house.

MARIAN. I’m afraid not.

PETER (*turning as he steps out on to the path*). Ah, you only rent this cottage—you’re an artist, I suppose.

MARIAN. On the piano ? Far from it !

PETER. I meant with the brush.

MARIAN (*with a faint smile*). Not nowadays.

(HOWARD appears L.C. and collects things to put on tray.)

PETER. Ha ! I *felt* I had met you in London.

MARIAN. I daresay. Many people passed through the house.

PETER. Ah, your people entertained a great deal.

MARIAN (*demurely*). A very great deal.

HOWARD (*picking up tray*). Her ladyship inquires, what would you like for dinner ?

MARIAN. Nothing, thank you—nothing at all. Would you mind showing these gentlemen to the house. (*Withdraws through door R.U. and closes it slowly.*)

PETER (*lifting hat*). Thank you. . . . (*To LANCELOT, who has remained tranced throughout.*) Aren't you coming ?

LANCELOT. I'll find my way alone.

PETER. Oh, you geniuses ! . . . Look here, Don Juan, if you don't turn up soon——!

(LANCELOT *hardly appears to hear and PETER follows HOWARD off along back path towards L. A silence, accentuated by bird-songs.*

*LANCELOT throws down his hat and taps at the door R.U.*)

LANCELOT (*huskily*). Mary Ann !

MARIAN (*opening door. Frigidly*). I beg your pardon.

LANCELOT (*taken aback*). I beg yours—I thought—and when you wanted no dinner——

MARIAN (*emerging a little*). Ah, the moment I saw you I knew you would do something extraordinary, Mr. Lancelot.

LANCELOT. You recognized me ?

MARIAN. Aren't your pictures in every paper ? (*Retreating, with hand on door-handle to close it.*)

LANCELOT. Oh, do stay and talk to me ! You are so like somebody I used to know.

MARIAN. Thank you, but I couldn't possibly entertain a genius —except unawares.

LANCELOT. Am I so terrifying ?

MARIAN. You'll break out again, I'll wager.

LANCELOT. Done ! What will you wager ?

MARIAN. Oh, I didn't mean literally.

LANCELOT. But I do. I'll bet you—a pair of gloves !

MARIAN (*tremulously*). A pair of gloves ?

LANCELOT. Isn't that what ladies usually wager ? (*A pause, in which one becomes conscious of the birds.*) How odd you should have my "Meadowsweet."

MARIAN (*half-mendaciously*). Oh, it was only a present ! . . . (*With anxious honesty.*) But I do love it !

LANCELOT. I am so glad. The whole mood in which I wrote it comes back to me as we talk. And how it all harmonizes—the thrushes, that white slip of a moon, the smell of your roses——

MARIAN (*who has come imperceptibly forward, offering pen*). Then oughtn't you to be writing it down ?

LANCELOT (*springing forward*). You are Mary Ann !

MARIAN (*icily, retreating to door*). I knew you would lose the gloves!

LANCELOT. Oh please! I am so distracted by the memory you revive!

MARIAN (*touched, shyly*). You, too, bring back a dear memory. LANCELOT (*galvanized afresh*). Whose name was Lancelot?

MARIAN (*shrinking back again*). No, no, Dick.

LANCELOT (*disappointed*). Dick?

MARIAN. How beautifully he sang!

LANCELOT (*too distracted to remember the bird*). Ah, in the musical profession. Then I might have known him.

MARIAN. You did once. But I shouldn't call him a professional. He never sang for money.

LANCELOT. Ah! That's your real artist!

MARIAN. But his wants were so few, dear Dick. And gold had no attraction for him.

LANCELOT. Would I could find such artists for *my* music!

MARIAN. I fear your music is too complex, too modern. All he could sing was (*imitating canary*) Sweet! Sweet!

LANCELOT. Then you *are* Mary Ann!!

MARIAN (*defiantly*). Yes, I am Mary Ann!

LANCELOT. Then I have found you again! (*Grasps her hands*.)

MARIAN. No, you have found merely Marian—whose hands (*withdrawing them*) you can bear without gloves, but whose heart you hardened to a stone. Ah, how ashamed I am to remember how I flung myself at you!

LANCELOT. Not so ashamed as I am to have flung you back. I was too miserably proud to marry you.

MARIAN. I did not seek to marry you.

LANCELOT. If I had only listened to my heart! I let you go, but you did not let me go, dear dream-child. You went on shaping my music. Ah, can't you forgive?

MARIAN. You have lost the gloves twice over, but I let you off.

LANCELOT. You give me mockery, not pity!

MARIAN. Pity! Even when you were unknown, you said you didn't want it—you were a man and would pull through. Oh, yes, I remember your words. Pity! The world's opinion was so much to you—and haven't you fame? "We artists care only for our art." And haven't you plenty to care for? Pity! My money loomed so large to you. And haven't you plenty of your own?

LANCELOT. Fame, art, money—they are like the bag of diamonds the thirsty Arab found in the desert. Love is all that counts.

MARIAN. Then surely the adored Lancelot doesn't need mine?

LANCELOT. Where else, Mary Ann, shall I find that sacred trust, that holy innocence?

MARIAN. That trust, that innocence . . . are dead.

LANCELOT. Don't say that, Mary Ann.

MARIAN. Dead . . . And Dick?

LANCELOT. Dead.

MARIAN. Poor Dick. (*Buries her face in her hands.*)

LANCELOT. Oh, I loved it. Was it not the last link between us? I fed it myself. I gave it seed, biscuits. I was most careful not to give it marmalade.

MARIAN (*half-laughing, half-crying*). Poor Mr. Lancelot! I do not blame you. But you see they have only such brief lives—faith and innocence and all the little joyous birds that sing within us and flutter against the cage of our hearts. Poor Innocence! Poor Faith! Poor Dick!

LANCELOT. And I have killed them all.

MARIAN (*wearily*). No—not Dick! And perhaps the others, too, died of age. One cannot live in a world like this and keep one's illusions. Oh, Lancelot, why did I not die too?

LANCELOT. Ah, you love me, you love me still!

MARIAN. No, nothing sings at my heart any more.

LANCELOT. Ah, let me try! (*As if to embrace her.*)

MARIAN. Too late! Why does everything in life come too late? Money—love?

LANCELOT (*bowing his head*). Fame—Repentance—

MARIAN. Yes, it is a sad world—and I am so tired. Good-bye.

LANCELOT. But not for always?

MARIAN. Yes, it is better so. (*Moving towards door.*)

LANCELOT (*springs at her and holds her to him*). No, no, you shall not go! I cannot let you go!

MARIAN (*struggling*). You must! You must!

LANCELOT. But I love you. Dearest, be my wife and—

MARIAN. You are to let me go.

LANCELOT (*releasing her and staggering back—a pause. Then, with attitudes and positions exactly the reverse of those in Act III, he drooping and she dignified*). Can't you marry me?

MARIAN. It is impossible.

LANCELOT. Why is it impossible?

MARIAN. Because—because—Oh, it's impossible. (*Makes a hopeless gesture, totters through door R.U. and closes it behind her.*)

(*LANCELOT looks after her stonily, then drops brokenly on to the music-stool. After a while his hands begin to touch the keys softly. And gradually he glides into the chorus played very pathetically of "Good-night and Good-bye."* As he finishes there is a tap at the door behind him.)

LANCELOT (*lost in reverie*). Yes?

(Enter MARY ANN, in her old cap and apron, putting on the old gloves.

LANCELOT becomes aware of her and turns on his stool.)

LANCELOT. Mary Ann!

MARY ANN. Yessir. (*Cheerfully smiling through tears.*)

(*LANCELOT jumps up.*)

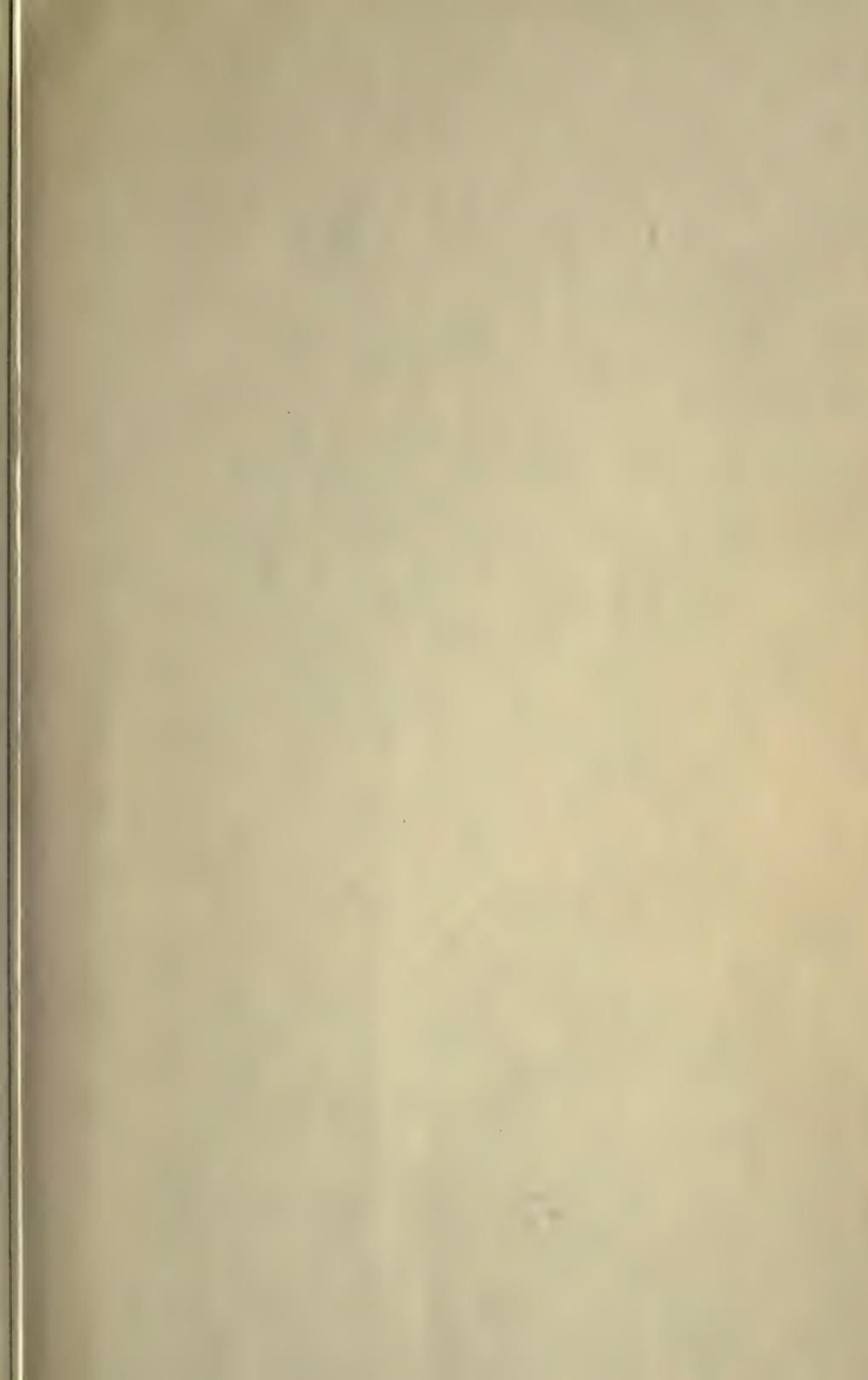
The birds at my heart did start singing. (*Pause.*) And so I came back!

LANCELOT. But you said your love was dead, you could not marry me.

MARY ANN. That was Marian, sir. This is merely Mary Ann——! (*Falls into his arms.*)

(*Music : "Kiss me good-night" in Orchestra, strings and reeds only.*)

CURTAIN.





*Continued from second page of cover.*

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